



## INTRODUCTION

*Frogs* is a work of theatrical, literary, and comic brilliance. It brings together a fascinating set of thematic strands—poetic, religious, mythological, political—and intertwines them into a complex plot that is unlike any other surviving Aristophanic play in its dramatic shape and dynamics. Its overriding claim to fame lies in the extended contest between the tragic playwrights Aischylos and Euripides which occupies the second half of the work—a contest which stands not only as one of Aristophanes' most bravura pieces of comic theatre but also as a remarkable 'document' in the history of Western poetics. But the first half of *Frogs* has its own riches to offer as well. These include the treatment of the god Dionysos as a sort of burlesque substitute for his brother Herakles on a journey down to Hades; Dionysos's famous encounter with the frog chorus of the play's title in the form of a competition for rhythmic supremacy between the god's clumsy rowing and the amphibians' insistent croaking; the appearance of the chorus of initiates whose activities in the underworld are a sort of mirror-image (though the mirror, as always, is comically distorting) of their Eleusinian celebrations on earth; and a series of episodes in which the threatened exposure of Dionysos as a pseudo-Herakles leads to a game of swapped identities between himself and his slave Xanthias.

In between the two halves of the plot, which are tied together by the dramatically improvisatory figure of Dionysos himself (first as Heraklean visitor to Hades, then as theatrical judge of the tragedians' contest), occurs the work's parabasis, which has attracted a great deal of attention for its comments on the contemporary political situation at Athens in 406–5. *Frogs* was first performed at the Lenaia festival (late January, early February) of 405; most of the play must therefore have been composed (and rehearsed, under the chorus-trainer Philonides) in the second half of 406. There is an ancient report that it was specifically the parabasis which was so admired by its first audience that Aristophanes was publicly honoured and *Frogs* specially awarded a re-performance (at Lenaia 404, it is normally assumed). If that was true, it is testimony to an extraordinary moment in Aristophanes' career. I shall return to this matter, and to the parabasis itself, at the end of

this Introduction. But let us start by taking some account of the historical context in which Aristophanes composed *Frogs* in 406–5.

Two aspects of that context are of particular relevance, though it required Aristophanes' distinctive sensibility, with its love of comic paradox, to bring them together into elements of the same play. One was the perilous military condition of Athens after practically a quarter of a century of war with Sparta, and a concomitant sense (lurking in the background at various points in *Frogs* but brought into sharp foreground focus near the end of the contest at 1417–66) that the survival of the city was more than ever at stake. Athens faced both financial and manpower shortages in attempting to sustain its war efforts at this date. During 406 it actually melted down some golden statues of Athena Nike on the Akropolis in order to make new coins (*Frogs* 720 alludes to this), and faced with an acute shortage of rowers for its fleet, it went so far, in the summer of this same year, as to offer freedom and citizenship to slaves who rowed on the triremes at the battle of Arginousai (a point referred to several times in *Frogs*).<sup>1</sup> Athens had won that battle, but nonetheless suffered large further losses and was plunged as a result into a traumatic political controversy.<sup>2</sup>

While writing *Frogs*, Aristophanes could not have known that Athens was only a few months away from final defeat in the war (the crucial juncture being defeat in the sea-battle of Aigospotamoi in late summer 405). But he, like many of the spectators at the first performance of *Frogs*, might have realized that the city could hardly maintain the same level of military activity much longer. As so often in the past, however, Athenian attitudes to the war were divided; more than one Spartan offer of peace was rejected during the final years of the war. Within *Frogs* itself Aristophanes might be thought to be hedging his bets. In a sentimental flourish at the very end of the play, the chorus briefly appeal to a desire for an end to war and curse the likes of the demagogue Kleophon, who is presented as still on the side of all-out belligerence (1531–3). Yet this flourish is linked to the fantasy return to life of Aischylos, a poet who had earlier proclaimed himself author of 'warlike' plays which taught the Athenians 'always to want to defeat their opponents' (1021–7), and whose view on how

<sup>1</sup> See my notes on *Frogs* 33, 191, 693–4.

<sup>2</sup> See my notes on *Frogs* 541, 1196.

Athens might best survive in the circumstances of 405 itself appears to be predicated on a *continuation* of war (1463–5)! *Frogs* does not send out (and why should it?) consistent signals about what attitude Athenians ought to take to the war.

The other most significant part of the background to *Frogs* was the death of the tragedian Euripides (in Makedon) at some point in early 406. This event, followed a few months later by the death of Sophokles,<sup>3</sup> prompted thoughts on Aristophanes' part (though hardly on his alone) of 'the end of an era' in the Athenian theatre: all the good tragedians are now dead, as Dionysos tries to explain to Herakles, and just the riff-raff is left (71–95). It seems hard to resist the inference that it was specifically the death of Euripides in 406 which triggered in Aristophanes the fundamental impulse of inspiration for *Frogs*, and certainly gave him the initial idea of a scenario in which Dionysos, god (among other things) of drama/theatre, would descend to Hades with the intention of bringing back his 'favourite' tragedian. Curiously, however, we know that what ensues from Dionysos's journey, namely the great contest between Euripides and Aischylos, was far from being a completely new Aristophanic conception at this date.

Aristophanes had always been somewhat obsessed with Euripides, who already makes an appearance (393–489) in *Acharnians* of 425, and provides material for extended parody in that play. The obsession if anything grew stronger with time, as *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411), earlier in this volume, demonstrates. Even the specific premise of the contest in *Frogs*—the head-on confrontation between Euripides and Aischylos—had been germinating for some time in Aristophanes' imagination. This is revealed by the fact that as early as *Clouds* (and the scene in question probably belonged to the first version of the play in 423) we fleetingly meet the idea of treating Aischylos and Euripides as polar opposites, and representatives of incompatible values, within the poetics of tragedy. In one of their violent altercations, Strepsiades and Pheidippides fall out precisely over their relative estimates of these two tragedians. The elderly father thinks of the early poet as supreme in his genre, his young son expresses contempt for

<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes must have inserted references to the death of Sophokles into the text of *Frogs* (at 76–82, 787–94, 1516–19) when composition of the play was already well under way; see my notes on those passages.

Aischylos (as a bombastic figure from the past) and chooses Euripides as a clever, 'modern' poet whose work he seems to like partly for its taboo-breaking daring (*Clouds* 1364–72). That passage shows that Aristophanes had long thought of an Aischylos–Euripides clash as a framework within which to pit (supposedly) traditional and modern values against one another. In *Frogs*, he was ready to turn that idea into an elaborately sustained piece of comic theatre.

If we put together the two aspects of Athenian history outlined above—the question of the city's recent fortunes in the long, exhausting war against Sparta, and the idea that a whole era of tragic drama had come to a close in 406—what should we make of their conjunction in relation to *Frogs*? There is, of course, no necessary or obvious link between them. Athenians must mostly have debated and calculated the city's military policies without giving any conscious thought to tragic poetry. Equally, many Athenians who cared passionately about tragedy and/or attached importance to the death of Euripides are unlikely to have correlated their views on the history of the genre with the precise issues of the war in 406–5. Yet Aristophanes subtly and suggestively sets up in *Frogs* an interplay between these two areas of Athenian experience. He even perhaps allows his comedy fitfully to toy with a sense that Athens' greatness, equally in poetry and politics (including warfare), may be on the wane. What he does not do, however, is to offer any explicit formulation of what this combination of themes amounts to.

Instead, Aristophanes gives his comedy a design which enables it to find its way rather belatedly and ambiguously to the point at which war and tragedy become entwined. Dionysos sets off to bring Euripides back from Hades because he is (in comically hyperbolic form) a passionate devotee of the playwright's work who cannot bear to think of losing such a dramatist from the world. Indeed, he even suggests that Euripides' poetry matters to him, as the symbolic god of theatre, as much as food and drink matter to his philistine brother Herakles (58–67, 105–7; see further below). But it is only once he is in the underworld that he finds himself enlisted to judge an acrimonious quarrel that has broken out between Aischylos and Euripides over the 'throne' of tragedy (755–811). It is, moreover, only at a late stage of the contest that he *retrospectively* (re-)interprets his original intention as having been to bring back to life a tragedian who can help 'save the city' (1419): it is here that, almost despairing of reaching a verdict

(1433–4), he finally turns to war-related matters—first the controversial figure of Alkibiades (1422–34), then a more general question about the city’s survival (1435–66)<sup>4</sup>—in an attempt (which turns out, even so, to be unsuccessful) to establish which of the playwrights has the most beneficial advice to give the city.

If Aristophanes has coloured *Frogs* with overlapping evocations of what we might call, for shorthand, the themes of ‘the end of tragedy’ and ‘the threat to the city’s survival’, he has done so in a way which hardly communicates any kind of stable conviction, let alone a practical thesis, about the state of Athens in 406–5. I have already noted above that the victory of Aischylos in the contest brings with it contradictory implications on the war front: the poet whose work is allegedly suffused with the spirit of military heroism and prowess will somehow (there is not the slightest indication of *just* how) enable Athens to bring its hostilities with Sparta to an end. The victory and return to earth of Aischylos is hard to interpret as anything more than an exercise in comically hazy nostalgia.

The strengths of *Frogs* lie elsewhere than in the supposed solution to Athens’ problems which some critics have taken its author to be advocating. It is a work which puts on display perhaps better than any other the whole spectrum of Aristophanes’ verbal and dramatic repertoire: from the obscenely earthy (the slave who compares the pleasure of betraying the master’s secrets to having an orgasm, 753; or Dionysos’s obscene ditty at 542–8) to the lyrically ingenious (the jagged conflict of musical and visual rhythms as Dionysos rows against the frog-chorus’s croaking, 209–67; or the wildly exaggerated parodies of each others’ song-styles exchanged by Aischylos and Euripides at 1264–1363); from one-line gags (the sarcastic corpse that would ‘rather come back to life’ than carry Dionysos’s luggage for too little payment, 177) to intricately constructed scenes that unfold in multiple stages (the dramatization of the Eleusinian initiates’ processional rituals, 316–459; or the oscillating comic logic of the sequence of episodes in which Dionysos repeatedly sheds and reclaims his identity as ‘Herakles’, 460–673).

Nor do Aristophanes’ preferred techniques and methods operate

<sup>4</sup> The order and attribution of lines in this last passage have been extensively debated and subjected to various textual reconstructions: see below on the putative revision of the play, together with my note on *Frogs* 1436.

discretely, one at a time; they are constantly combined and recombined in ways that produce a sort of layering of comic meanings. Appreciation of these qualities requires us, as modern readers, to exercise our visual and aural imaginations, in as historically informed a manner as possible, in order to compensate for the gap between words on the page and the vivid immediacy of theatrical performance. To bring out this point, let me comment illustratively on three sections from the first half of *Frogs*.

At the very start of the play, Aristophanes stages a wonderfully ironic and enigmatic mélange of visual and verbal elements. Many critics have dwelt on the metatheatrical paradox of the initial exchanges between Dionysos and Xanthias: they speak self-consciously as characters in a play, ostensibly drawing attention to the cheap, vulgar humour of other comic playwrights while simultaneously taking advantage of the joke-motifs in question for Aristophanes' own purposes. But that is only one of several strands woven together at the start of the play. For the original theatre audience, the scene's visually peculiar components would have been striking.<sup>5</sup> A 'master' (1) with Heraklean garb (lion-skin and club) superimposed over a woman's saffron dress and high boots is leading a donkey on which a luggage-carrying slave is riding: how make sense of such a bizarre configuration of features? Some spectators might have guessed, even before it is confirmed at line 22, that the master is Dionysos (in a pot-bellied, buffoonish form which reflects older comic traditions<sup>6</sup>), since the god, in his 'Asiatic' style, was often artistically depicted in quasi-female garments and was indeed thought of as a deity capable of blurring gender distinctions (cf. Euripides' *Bacchae*). Spectators alert enough to make that identification might additionally have spotted a mythological joke in the replacement of a fawn- or panther-skin (a badge of Dionysiac rituals)

<sup>5</sup> For one artist's (probable) depiction of this opening scene, presumably in connection with a later production of the play in Magna Graecia, see the fourth-century Apulian vase (formerly Berlin F3046, now lost) discussed and illustrated in O. Taplin, *Comic Angels* (Oxford, 1993), 45–7 and pl. 13.7, and E. Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theater* (Chichester, 2010), 58–61.

<sup>6</sup> Dionysos's fat belly is alluded to by Charon at 200. A buffoonish Dionysos had already been a character not only in Aristophanes' own *Babylonians* of 426 (see the Appendix to this volume) but also in earlier works by other comic poets, including Kratinos' *Dionysalexandros* and Eupolis' *Taxiarchs*: see J. Rusten (ed.), *The Birth of Comedy* (Baltimore, 2011), 181–4, 264–8, for the evidence.

with the lion-skin.<sup>7</sup> But they would still have been intrigued by the riding slave and also by the pseudo-Heraklean outfit, which, in a nice piece of comic self-reflectiveness, produces an outburst of mirth on the part of Herakles himself (42–5).

The Heraklean garb does get explained in due course, though in a way which helps to set up Dionysos as an absurdly naive deity in this context: costume alone can hardly equip one to face the terrors of Hades (as the subsequent episodes will bear out). In the text itself the riding-slave motif receives a rather casual, incomplete explanation (21–4: yet why *allow* a slave such indulgence?), but it has the capacity to stimulate the audience's minds with further comic implications and associations. One possibility is to take the apparently inverted master-slave hierarchy as preparing the way for later references to the recent emancipation and enfranchisement of slaves who fought in the navy at the battle of Arginousai.<sup>8</sup> Another is to see it as forming a witty visual 'pun' on a myth that many spectators would remember well, namely how Dionysos eventually brought back Hephaistos to Olympos after he had been flung away at birth by his mother Hera. That scene was often depicted with Hephaistos riding on a donkey, Dionysos on foot.<sup>9</sup> The full irony of this oblique allusion to the Hephaistos story at the start of *Frogs* only transpires once we learn that Dionysos is en route to *Hades*, not Olympos.

The play's opening, then, involves a plurality of comic ingredients, managing to fuse together metatheatre, scatology, master-slave banter (including the play on semantics at 25–30), and mythological confusion into a lively concoction that gives the work an initial burst of comic energy. One specific detail of the passage—a glimpse of Dionysos's strong reactions as a theatrical spectator himself (16–18)—helps to sow the seed for the subsequent conversation between Dionysos and his brother Herakles (38–72). Once again, it would be possible to analyse that conversation in terms of

<sup>7</sup> It is conceivable, if one thinks of spectators who liked trying to interpret clues at the start of a comedy (cf. Aristophanes' joke on this very idea at *Peace* 43–8), that some might have wondered about the Herakles who was made to dress as a woman while enslaved to the Lydian queen Omphale, though we do not know how early this 'transvestite' motif was invented: cf. T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore, 1993), 439–40.

<sup>8</sup> See my note on *Frogs* 33.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. T. H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London, 1991), 13–17 with ill. 2–13 (various), for the myth and its depiction in visual art. Cf. I. Lada-Richards, *Initiating Dionysus* (Oxford, 1999), 132–4, 156–7.



Aristophanes' typical liking for combining different techniques and registers of humour in a rich dramatic mélange. But I would like here to concentrate on just one aspect of this encounter between the 'real' Herakles and Dionysos's poor imitation of him—the aspect which anticipates what will turn out to be the play's main subject-matter, the values of tragic theatre. Via a rather zigzagging process, which includes jokes about warfare, sex, and food (47–65), Dionysos eventually reveals to Herakles the yearning passion he has for the recently deceased Euripides and his plan to descend to the underworld and bring him back to life.<sup>10</sup> What emerges from this is a comically spiced clash of values between the sensuous, poetry-loving Dionysos and the bluff, philistine Herakles.

Like most Greek gods and heroes, Dionysos and Herakles traditionally possessed multiple traits and qualities that could be developed in different narrative forms. Aristophanes deftly chooses just those attributes which are conducive to a disagreement about whether poetry is one of life's supreme pleasures and goods.<sup>11</sup> Dionysos, as god of theatre (as well as a deity associated with intense states of rapture), represents the allegiances and impulses of those who love poetry: he speaks in quasi-erotic vocabulary of the intense desire and longing aroused in him by Euripides' works. Herakles, by sharp contrast, as a supremely practical hero who primarily seeks fuel for his bodily appetites, just cannot understand his brother's attachment to such cultural activities. Dionysos is nervous of his brother's views (58–60), especially after the latter has mocked him several times (42–58). Although Herakles knows the names of tragic playwrights (73–87), he conveys a sense of insouciance about such matters: 'if you really *must* fetch someone' (77) sets the tone, which is expanded by the reference to hordes of young poets 'with more gift of the gab than Euripides' (89–91) and the description of Euripides' own poetry as 'a great big con-trick' and 'a load of rubbish' (104–6). As Dionysos insinuates with his neat put-down, 'Don't try to inhabit my mind . . .

<sup>10</sup> For another Aristophanic play which involved poetry and a visit to the underworld, see the Appendix on *Gerytades*.

<sup>11</sup> The mythological tradition in fact made Herakles an ambiguous figure vis-à-vis poetry and music: in some art/poetry he is an accomplished musician who can even play for the gods; in other places he is depicted as a failed student who kills his own music-teacher!

I'll take your advice on *food* (105–7), Herakles stands for the sort of person who simply could not care less about good poetry.<sup>12</sup>

This exchange between god and hero (or, perhaps, two gods) is entertaining in its own right for the piquant back-and-forth of its dialogue. But it has further implications for the play as a whole: it points towards key issues of 'poetics', and above all, towards the depth of feelings experience of poetry can involve and the life-significance to be attached to those experiences. Now, on one level there is an underlying and teasing self-referentiality about the clash of values between Dionysos and Herakles. Aristophanic comedy itself abounds in ideas of (and characters who pursue) the pleasures of both food and sex, but what it actually *gives* its own audience is neither of those experiences but instead the pleasures of dramatic poetry. So comedy, in a sense, is necessarily on the side of Dionysos more than that of Herakles. At the same time, however, Dionysos is going to Hades with a passionate longing for a tragic, not a comic, poet, and that is something which allows Aristophanes to activate his penchant for a sort of 'inter-generic' rivalry with tragedy. Comedy, in other words, has a vested interest in questions of poetic value—but it can also, ambiguously and ironically, treat those questions at the arm's length of humour, exploring their inbuilt potential (and *everything*, in Aristophanes' universe, has such potential) for comic uncertainty and instability.

Before I turn to the sustained treatment of (tragic) poetry's values in the second half of *Frogs*, consider briefly one final illustration of the range and inventiveness of Aristophanes' dramatic repertoire from the first half of the play. This is the long sequence of songs, dances, and interactions between chorus and characters which forms the parodos of the Eleusinian initiates (316–459). There are many angles one might take on this fascinating passage. What I want to highlight is the irresistible manner in which Aristophanes turns the initiates' Iakchos procession into an enactment of comic festivity itself, allowing images and evocation of the Eleusinian occasion to merge with the expectations of comedy's own practices of revelry and ridicule.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Compare my comments on Euripides' Kinsman in the Introduction to *Women at the Thesmophoria*.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the treatment of the Rural Dionysia at *Acharnians* 241–79 and of the Choes at *Acharnians* 1000–1234: in both cases, the festival in question becomes an enactment of comedy's own festive values.

Even within Eleusinian terms, there is a slippery doubleness about the setting: the chorus are, at the same time, performing their earthly procession from Athens to Eleusis (though the parodos conflates different stages of the festival)<sup>14</sup> and celebrating their privileged afterlife in Hades, the reward for initiation into the Mysteries.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the parodos particular emphasis is placed on the theme of ‘play’: the Greek vocabulary in question (involving the verb *paizein* and its cognates) is a leitmotif of the scene, occurring no fewer than ten times in around 150 lines. The theme of ‘play’ brings with it a cluster of associations: hence it appears in my translation in the form of, and/or in conjunction with, ‘celebration’ (319), ‘dance’ (334, 388, 408, 411, 415), ‘making merry’ (376, juxtaposed with ‘ridicule’ and ‘mocking humour’, as also at 392), and general high spirits (444, 452). While this borrows something from the atmosphere of the Eleusinian procession itself, which undoubtedly made room for a number of ribald rituals of laughter,<sup>16</sup> it also inescapably stamps the occasion with the distinctive ethos of Old Comedy, a mixture of perpetual mirth and derision. And a similar point applies to subordinate themes such as the attractions of food (337–9), a sense of rejuvenation (345–53), and the pleasures of sex (409–13).

As always with Aristophanes, we need to read with an eye for concrete theatricality. When Dionysos and Xanthias hear, see, and even *smell* (314, cf. 338) the initiates approaching, they decide to hide out of sight and observe the procession (315). But their subsequent comments (318–22, 337–9) support the hypothesis that they remain visible to the *audience* throughout the scene, huddled together at one corner of the stage building. If so, this means that the whole scene has both foreground and background, with the god and his slave no

<sup>14</sup> Line 320 refers to the Agora at Athens, close to where the procession to Eleusis started, but the torches (313, 340 ff.) fit the night-time arrival at Eleusis itself, while the proclamation at 354 ff. reflects a stage of the festival four or five days earlier (as, probably, does the smell of sacrificial pigs, 338); meadows (e.g. 326, 343) evoke a traditional underworld topography, not Eleusis itself. For details of the actual Eleusinian festival, cf. R. Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford, 2005), 347–50.

<sup>15</sup> For the promise to Eleusinian initiates of a happy afterlife, see Parker, *Polytheism and Society*, 361–2.

<sup>16</sup> See S. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter* (Cambridge, 2008), 161–72, for details of the evidence. I take the serio-comic model of *Frogs* 389–90 (‘... many jokes | But many serious things as well’), addressed to Demeter (384), to convey something of the mixed moods of the Eleusinian procession; it should not be treated as an ‘authorial’ Aristophanic agenda.

doubt reacting physically, with gestures and the like, to what they see before them. The *parodos*, in other words, is not detached from, but remains very firmly embedded in, Dionysos's experience of his descent to Hades. And the entirety of what the audience would witness, including the antics of the two 'hidden' characters, helps to throw into relief the eventual intrusion of those characters into the singing and dancing at 413 ff. Rather than introducing themselves first, they rush forward impulsively, overcome by an excited desire to join in with the general celebratory spirit of the occasion (which immediately turns into a satirical song, including some of the obscenest lyrics found anywhere in Aristophanes). That climax to the scene confirms that the fundamental matrix of the *parodos* is comedy's own realm of festive laughter. A nice indication of this is the description of the whole supposedly ritual context, in the proclamation at 357, as 'the cult of Kratinos the bull-eating god'. Through the symbolic figure of Kratinos, the most successful comic playwright of the generation before Aristophanes, comedy turns itself into an imaginary 'mystery religion' in its own right, but one whose 'ancient rites' (cf. 368) are unmistakably rooted in irreverence and hilarity.

By looking at selected details from the very start of *Frogs*, from the conversation between Dionysos and Herakles, and from the *parodos* of Eleusinian initiates, we have been able to see something of the heterogeneous styles of humour on which Aristophanes constantly plays variations. Dionysos's descent to Hades is in fact notable for its loosely episodic form and for the correspondingly multifarious comic modes which the play encompasses as the action twists and turns through the encounters with Herakles, a corpse, the ferryman Charon, the croaking frog chorus, the (probably) unseen monster Empousa, the Eleusinian initiates, a pair of underworld innkeepers, and various servants of Plouton, god of Hades. But this diversity of characters and situations adds up to only a temporary set of digressions and distractions from the trajectory on which Dionysos had set himself by going down to Hades to bring Euripides back to life.

Dionysos returns to that trajectory, though with a subtle shift of direction, when he finds himself invited to judge the dispute that has broken out between Aischylos, reigning occupant of the underworld 'throne' of tragedy (761-9), and the newly arrived Euripides. The resulting contest of tragedians turns into one of the most concentrated and ambitiously 'architected' stretches of action anywhere in

the surviving plays of Aristophanes. Its engagement with the poetics of tragedy is so extensive that the second half of *Frogs*, for all its comic absurdities, stands as our most substantial piece of evidence for ways in which Athenians might have thought, felt, and argued about tragedy in the late fifth century. This part of the play has, indeed, acquired the semi-autonomous status of a 'document' in the evolution of literary and dramatic criticism.<sup>17</sup> But what kind of achievement does it represent on Aristophanes' part, to have created a comic text that has become a primary point of reference for the history of tragedy?

To orientate ourselves towards the structure of the contest, we can usefully think of it as organized along two axes. The first involves the series of theatrical topics, themes, and issues addressed in the various stages of the debate—a kind of 'anatomization' of tragedy.<sup>18</sup> In the 'agon' proper (895–1098),<sup>19</sup> the traditional comic form of head-to-head argument, the two playwrights introduce a mixture of considerations (*pro* themselves and *contra* one another) concerning dramaturgy, poetic styles, characterization, educational and ethical value, and the general relationship between their plays and the wider trends of Athenian society. In the following scene (1119–1250) they analyse each other's prologues, here focusing on a number of small-scale linguistic points. After that (1261–63) they undertake scathingly negative and elaborately parodic treatment of each other's choral songs. Since none of these stages of the contest yields a clear outcome in the eyes of the judge Dionysos, we then proceed to the 'weighing' of words at 1365–1410—an exercise which translates into preposterously mechanistic terms the nonetheless significant idea of evaluating the comparative worth of different pieces of poetry. Finally, and as noted earlier, Dionysos approaches the two playwrights as potential sources of insight for the benefit of Athens as a whole: he asks them for their views on subjects important to the politics of the city, first the controversial figure of Alkibiades (1422–34), then the general question of how the city can best ensure its survival (1435–66). In the

<sup>17</sup> Hence its inclusion in e.g. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (eds.), *Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1972), the standard anthology on the subject.

<sup>18</sup> Anatomization: in this connection, note the metaphorical 'sinews' of tragedy at 862, which may reflect larger conceptions of poetic form in terms of a quasi-organic 'body', as later attested at e.g. Plato, *Phaedrus* 264c, Aristotle, *Poetics* 7.1450b37–51a4.

<sup>19</sup> See the general Introduction, 'Formality and Performance'.

course of these various sections of the contest, we can trace several types of critical assumptions and methods at work, from the minute analysis of individual words and phrases to larger claims about whole plays, along with fluctuating appeals—in the judgement of tragedy's cultural value—to pleasure, technical craft, emotional expressiveness, and socio-political influence.

That first axis, then, is one along which we can plot the critical divisions of tragedy's poetic and dramatic artistry. But the second axis is one which exposes the extent of the differences between the poets themselves in all the features and aspects of their works. The tragedians' contest is pervaded by a strong sense of the two poets as authors whose entire personalities are imprinted on, and revealed by, their work. The resulting polarization can be broken down into a set of stark contrasts along the following lines.

<i>Aischylos</i>	<i>Euripides</i>
portentous grandeur	quotidian realism
heroic ethos	'democratic' ethos
larger-than-life characters	characters 'like us'
brooding silences	loquacious rhetoric
'Achillean' (in anger)	'Odyssean' (in craftiness) <sup>20</sup>
opaque language	quibbling word-chopping
masculine vigour	female eroticism
warlike spirit	banal vulgarity
inspiring uplift	encouragement of 'suspicion'
toughens through fear	softens through pity
long, obscure choral odes	neurotic solo songs
mysterious openings	mechanically explanatory prologues
affinity with Eleusinian Mysteries	abstract deities (Tongue, Astuteness)

It is very hard, in the absence of other forms of evidence, to say how far the conception of poetic authorship as a matter of constant *self-expression* (which supposedly allows us to read back from text to author at every point) was shared by audiences and readers in

<sup>20</sup> Aischylos is given explicit associations with Achilles at 912, 992, 1264; cf. 1020. Euripides is never explicitly called Odyssean, but cf. his craftiness at e.g. 957–8.

fifth-century Athens.<sup>21</sup> But it is certainly a highly convenient conception for Aristophanes' purposes, since it allows him to convert all the contest's issues of language, style, character, dramaturgy, and so forth into facets of the colourful comic figures presented to the audience directly onstage (and no doubt suitably embodied in their costumes and physical deportment). This means that, as with so much else in Aristophanes, we are dealing with 'multi-layered' constructions: the two tragedians take on an immediate dramatic life of their own, but they are also symbols and representatives of their theatrical careers and oeuvres as a whole—and even, on another level again, of the whole putative 'spirit of the age' (the era of the Persian Wars in Aischylos' case, and of the radical democracy of late fifth-century Athens in Euripides') to which each of them belonged.

That last point alerts us, however, to a basic asymmetry in the framework of the contest: an asymmetry in the relationship between *Frogs*' own audience and the phases of Athenian culture which the two tragedians allegedly epitomize. Aischylos was born 120 years before the production of *Frogs* in 405: his career started around 500, he died in 456. Any spectators of *Frogs* who had seen even the late plays of Aischylos as adults would have been in their mid-seventies in 405; if they had seen the first performance of *Persians* in 472 (mentioned at *Frogs* 1026), that figure would rise to around ninety. There cannot have been more than a few such spectators, and although we know that some of Aischylos' plays were re-performed after his death, this is unlikely to have given most spectators of *Frogs* a detailed familiarity with many of his works. In other words, most of the audience of *Frogs* were by definition part of the 'era' of Euripides; and since *Frogs* presents that era as one corrupted by Euripides' plays, the audience of the comedy was itself notionally implicated in Euripidean decadence.<sup>22</sup> The point is made explicitly by both tragedians: Aischylos condemns contemporary Athenians en masse (see especially 807–9, 1014–15, 1069–70, 1088), while Euripides claims that his plays have indeed

<sup>21</sup> Remember that Dionysos, as god of drama, is characterized as both a *spectator* (16–18, with immediate reference to comedy; cf. e.g. 1028–9) and a *reader* (52–4). The whole contest presupposes tragedy's status as a performance genre while at the same time treating it, through its reliance on constant *quotation*, as something that can be critically analysed as 'text'.

<sup>22</sup> There is an analogous point about the audience of *Clouds* in relation to the agon between Immoral and Moral: cf. my Introduction to that play.

shaped the mentality of this same generation (954, 960, 972). This does not, of course, compel individual spectators to feel in any particular way about the terms of the debate: individuals could dissociate themselves from the faults of their times. But it does add another layer of comic complexity to the whole competition, making it an intrinsically unbalanced clash between a nostalgically idealized past and a necessarily flawed 'modernity'.

But what are we to make of the *judge*, the 'critic',<sup>23</sup> of this elaborate contest, Dionysos himself? He starts out as a passionate devotee of Euripides but ends up bringing back Aischylos instead. Does that mean he gradually (or eventually) learns something about the standards of the best tragedy and its link to the best state of Athenian society? Many scholars have thought so. But the text of *Frogs* completely belies all such 'teleological' interpretations. At lines 1411–12 Dionysos states that he does not *want* to choose between the two playwrights (he wants them both as his 'friends'), and as late as line 1433 he professes himself simply unable to choose a winner. When forced by Plouton to pick one of them, he does so without giving a single *reason* (1468–78). It is hard to see how Aristophanes could have done any more to display Dionysos's inability (and unwillingness) to find a coherent critical basis on which to judge one style of tragic drama superior to another. Dionysos is the god of drama/theatre; he is also, as we saw, a lover of poetry, someone for whom good poetry is a thrilling life-value. Yet he cannot rationalize the critical judgements he is called upon to make: he feels that poetry matters, but cannot translate his feelings into a coherent, reasoned account. And part of what he feels (with, admittedly, an admixture of ludicrous buffoonery: he remains, after all, a quintessentially comic character) is that both Aischylos and Euripides are capable of fascinating him. If there is an underlying 'message' at all to the contest in *Frogs*, it is a message not about which of the two playwrights is really superior but about the problem of poetic *criticism* itself.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The whole vocabulary of 'judging' in *Frogs* uses the same Greek terms from which we derive the language of 'critic', 'criticism', etc.: i.e. the noun *krisis* ('judgement', 'competition') at 779, 785, 1467, and the cognate verb ('judge', 'choose between' etc.) at e.g. 805, 873, 1411, 1473.

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller version of this approach to the contest, see S. Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* (Oxford, 2011), 93–154; cf. the shrewd remarks of N. Lowe, 'Aristophanes' Books', *Annals of Scholarship*, 10 (1993), 63–83 (at 74–8).



That conclusion, I suggest, has further subversive implications for all attempts—and there have been many of them—to extract from *Frogs* an authentically Aristophanic ‘poetics’: a model of what makes poetry, comic as well as (or even instead of) tragic, good. After all, if the contest of tragedians seems to show that the quest for consistent, rational, and definitive criteria for judgements of poetic value is an unfulfillable goal in the case of tragic poetry (and we have seen that this point was already anticipated in the gap between Dionysos’s love for Euripides and Herakles’ view of the latter’s poetry as ‘a load of rubbish’), why should it be any different in the case of comedy itself? Can Aristophanes really have his cake and eat it, exposing the contestability of standards of value in another dramatic genre while laying claim to canonical standards in his own work? Those who think that he *can* are inevitably caught in a paradox: namely, that the play’s conversion of deeply serious tragedy into extravagant absurdity is at the same time the vehicle of a claim to some kind of ‘seriousness’ on the part of comedy itself. But is this paradox a pointer to something important or merely an illusion produced by a desire on the part of critics to find in comedy (just as Dionysos does with tragedy) something of lasting value?

Those who believe that *Frogs* has a clear and positive poetics of its own, and that this poetics underpins Aristophanes’ intention to ‘teach’ his audience something of direct relevance to the life of the city, unsurprisingly attach considerable significance to the play’s parabasis, where the chorus—in a traditional parabolic pose—purport to ‘give the city | Best advice and best instructions’ (686–7), and proceed to urge that Athens should restore full citizen rights to those previously punished for anti-democratic activities. There is no doubt that this ‘advice’ reflects a realistic political option for the city: something very like it was implemented, through the decree of Patrokleides, later in 405.<sup>25</sup> But that point needs qualifying in two respects. First, Aristophanes makes his chorus echo a sentiment which, as Patrokleides’ decree confirms, must have been gradually winning support in Athens under the pressure of the city’s increasingly acute shortage of manpower for the war against Sparta (see above). To that

<sup>25</sup> Our main evidence for that decree is Andokides, *On the Mysteries* 73–80, though the text of the decree is spurious: see M. Canevaro and E. M. Harris, ‘The Documents in Andokides’ *On the Mysteries*’, *Classical Quarterly*, 62 (2012), 98–129 (at 100–10).

extent, the parabasis is probably an attempt to strike a chord in tune with a growing mood of ‘solidarity’ in a time of political and military crisis (near-terminal crisis, as the defeat at Aigospotamoi later in 405 demonstrated). Secondly, whatever kind of gesture we might take the parabasis to be, it does nothing to determine the ‘meaning’ of *Frogs* as a whole. I noted earlier in this Introduction that *Frogs* sends out inconsistent signals about Athens’ policy in the war, not least in relation to the stance of the victorious Aischylos. What’s more, it seems that in the contest of tragedians it is actually Euripides who, at 1446–50, comes closest to sounding a note that chimes with part of the parabasis.<sup>26</sup> If we want to ascribe a ‘poetics’ to Aristophanes in *Frogs* (or beyond), we had better make plenty of room in it for comic caprice and incongruity.

There is a final point to be touched on in regard to the parabasis of *Frogs*. An ancient source, going back to Aristotle’s pupil Dikaiarchos, reports that the play received a second performance; it also states, though we cannot be at all sure that Dikaiarchos himself said this, that the second performance was the specific result of a favourable reaction to the play’s parabasis.<sup>27</sup> Great caution is called for in interpreting this testimony. It is one thing to accept that Dikaiarchos could have had evidence for a second performance of *Frogs* at some date. It is quite another to suppose, as a modern consensus does, that this was at one of the dramatic festivals of 404. By then, Athens’ navy had been definitively defeated, the city was being besieged into starvation, and negotiations with Sparta were under way for the terms of surrender. If *Frogs* had been re-performed at that date, several passages of the play would have been jarringly anachronistic. These include various references to the war as an ongoing naval enterprise (e.g. 362–4, 1065–6, 1437–41, 1465), but above all the parabasis itself, with its

<sup>26</sup> Some editors give these lines (or at least 1446–8) to Aischylos; the issue is entangled with larger questions about the state of the text in this part of the play. But if we retain the transmitted order of lines (see my note on *Frogs* 1436), the lines in question have to be spoken by Euripides.

<sup>27</sup> *Hypothesis I(c)* (Dover) to *Frogs* says ‘the play was so admired for its parabasis that it was re-performed, as Dikaiarchos says’. The ‘Life’ of Aristophanes (test. 1.35–9, Kassel–Austin) says Aristophanes was crowned with olive for the parabasis of *Frogs*. An attempt is made by A. H. Sommerstein, *Talking about Laughter* (Oxford, 2009), 254–71, to combine these sources into evidence for the hypothesis of re-performance at the Lenaia of 404. But his argument is highly speculative and does not properly address the point made in my text about jarring anachronisms.

suggestion that the previously disenfranchised should be given their rights back precisely on condition that they fight in the navy (701–2). How could a re-performance in early 404 have *celebrated* such ideas, when by that stage all attempts to sustain Athens' war effort had been tried and failed? If we want to believe that *Frogs* received a second performance, it is safer to infer that this was some time later, well after the end of the war (when the play's originally topical references could be received from a historical 'distance'), and that the supposed linkage with the parabasis was the result of idle later speculation.<sup>28</sup>

*Frogs* is an Aristophanic masterpiece, composed and performed during a period when Athenian fortunes in the long Peloponnesian War were threatening to become desperate. The play acknowledges that historical background by some of its references to contemporary circumstances and the perilous 'survival' of the city. But that does not warrant us in treating *Frogs* as itself somehow purporting to have the key to that survival (which, as Aristophanes well knew, depended on ships, manpower, money, and complex diplomacy), still less as issuing an invitation to think of comedy as a genre properly suited to solve such problems. What Aristophanes offers his fellow-Athenians instead is a dazzling fiction in which fantasized versions of past and present, gods and humans, poetry and politics are melded together into a world that no one could inhabit outside the imagination of the theatre. Comedy cannot make much difference to the course of a military conflict, but it can lift the spirits of its audience with temporary exhilaration, and perhaps some consolation, even in the dark days of war.

<sup>28</sup> The claim about Aristophanes' olive crown (n. 27 above) is part of conspicuously flimsy generalizations about how he was cherished by the Athenians for his pro-democratic sentiments.

# *FROGS*

## Speaking Characters

XANTHIAS: slave of DIONYSOS  
DIONYSOS: god of theatre, wine, and ecstasy  
HERAKLES: famous hero and brother of DIONYSOS  
CORPSE: anonymous, recently deceased person  
CHARON: ferryman of the Acherousian lake in Hades  
FROGS: singing/dancing group in amphibian costumes  
CHORUS (24 dancers/singers): of Eleusinian initiates in Hades  
LEADER: of the CHORUS  
DOORKEEPER: of PLOUTON's palace  
SLAVE<sup>A</sup>: of PLOUTON and Persephone (Pherrephatta)  
INNKEEPER (female): in Hades  
PLATHANE: a second Innkeeper  
EURIPIDES: tragic playwright  
AISCHYLOS: tragic playwright  
PLOUTON: god of the underworld  
SLAVE<sup>D</sup>: another slave of PLOUTON

## Silent Characters

CARRIERS: of the CORPSE's bier  
SLAVES<sup>B</sup> and <sup>C</sup>: accompanying INNKEEPER and PLATHANE  
ATTENDANTS: under the command of the palace DOORKEEPER  
EURIPIDES' MUSE: a castanet-playing female figure

[The stage building has a single central door which will serve at 35 ff. as the house of HERAKLES and later as the palace of PLOUTON in Hades. The two side entrances (eisodoi) connect the on-stage scenes with loosely defined off-stage locations, both on earth and in the underworld. From one eisodos enter DIONYSOS and XANTHIAS, the former leading a donkey on which the latter, holding assorted baggage on a pole over his shoulder, is riding. The god, a portly and elderly figure, is dressed in long boots and a saffron dress, with, à la Herakles, a lion-skin on top and a large club in his hand. The two characters make their way falteringly towards the centre of the orchêstra.]

XANTHIAS [*nonchalantly*]. Shall I tell them some of the usual gags then, master,

The things spectators *always* find so funny?

DIONYSOS [*wearily*]. Say what you like—except ‘I’m all hard-pressed’.\*

Steer clear of *that*: it’s trite and makes my gorge rise.

XANTHIAS. But something else that’s witty?

DIONYSOS. Except ‘I’m squashed’.

XANTHIAS. Well then, should I tell them an excellent joke?

DIONYSOS. Go ahead,

Feel free. But avoid that old routine—

XANTHIAS. Which one?

DIONYSOS. Where you shift your load and say that you need a shit!

XANTHIAS. But can’t I say that I’m carrying such a weight

That unless it’s removed I’ll release an explosive fart? 10

DIONYSOS. Please don’t, I beg you—unless you want me to vomit!

XANTHIAS. Well what was the point of making me carry this baggage

If I can’t make the jokes you hear in Phrynichos’ plays

Or the kind that Lykis and also Ameipsias writes?\*

Their comedies always have these baggage-slave scenes.

DIONYSOS. But just don’t do it. I know that when I’m watching

And see that kind of ‘sophisticated’ humour,

I’ve aged by more than a year when I leave the theatre.\*

XANTHIAS. This neck of mine is damned to perdition in that case.

It’s getting *squashed* but is being denied its jokes.

[DIONYSOS *halts and looks up at XANTHIAS in disgust before delivering the following lines directly to the audience.*]

DIONYSOS. But look at this outrage here—just look how he's pampered!

I'm the god Dionysos himself, the son of Wine-jar,  
Yet here I'm struggling on foot while letting him *ride*,  
To make sure he's not worn out by the weight of his load.

XANTHIAS. But aren't I carrying still?

DIONYSOS. Not when you're riding!

XANTHIAS [*pointing to his pole*]. I'm carrying this!

DIONYSOS. How come?

XANTHIAS. Because it's so heavy!

DIONYSOS. But isn't the donkey bearing the weight that you've got?

XANTHIAS. Not the weight that I'm carrying here, no he's certainly not.

DIONYSOS. But how can you carry a thing when you're being carried?

XANTHIAS. I really don't know—except that this shoulder's *hard-pressed*! 30

DIONYSOS. Well if you're saying the donkey is lending no help  
Try picking it up yourself and see what that's like!

XANTHIAS. Oh misery me! If only I'd served in that sea-fight\*—  
I'd tell you to go and get stuffed, I really would!

DIONYSOS. Dismount, you rogue. This door you can see over here  
Is the very first place this journey of mine was meant  
To bring me to. [*Knocking*] Hoy, slave, open up, open up!

[*While XANTHIAS gets down from the donkey and leads it to the corner of the stage building, where it disappears from view, the door of the stage building opens abruptly and HERAKLES, also wearing a lion-skin, steps out aggressively—but soon starts to crack up at what he sees.*]

HERAKLES. Who battered the door just now? Like a violent Centaur,\*

Whoever it was who crashed—[*seeing* DIONYSOS] oh, what have we here?

DIONYSOS [*to* XANTHIAS]. Look, slave.

40

XANTHIAS. What is it?

DIONYSOS.

Well didn't

you see?

XANTHIAS. See what?

DIONYSOS. The way he took fright at me.

XANTHIAS.

Yes, in case you were mad!

HERAKLES. In Demeter's name, I just can't stop myself laughing.

I'm biting my lip but it's just no use—I must laugh! [*Guffaws.*]

DIONYSOS [*to HERAKLES*]. Old chap, please come over here.

I need a favour.

HERAKLES. But I just can't stifle this laughter that's overcome me

At the sight of this lion-skin here with your saffron dress.\*

[*In mocking tone*] What's your state of mind? Why these boots and club combined?\*

Where on earth have you been?

DIONYSOS [*blustering*].

I was sailing on Kleisthenes' boat.\*

HERAKLES. You were in the sea-fight?

DIONYSOS.

That's right, and we must

have sunk

A dozen or more of the enemy's fleet of ships.\*

50

HERAKLES. The pair of you?

DIONYSOS.

That's right!

XANTHIAS [*sarcastically*].

And then I woke up!

DIONYSOS. In fact it was on board ship as I read to myself

That play *Andromeda*, all of a sudden it happened.\*

The most intense desire took hold of my heart.

HERAKLES. A desire? How strong exactly?

DIONYSOS [*coily*].

Quite small—like

Molon!\*

HERAKLES. Desire for a woman?

DIONYSOS.

No, no.

HERAKLES.

Then a boy?

DIONYSOS.

Not at all.

HERAKLES. For a *man*?

DIONYSOS [*shuddering*]. Oh dear!

HERAKLES.

Ah, you *did* it with Kleisthenes!

DIONYSOS. Don't mock me, brother. I'm really not feeling too well.

It's a terrible longing that's piercing me through and through.

HERAKLES. What kind, little brother?

60

DIONYSOS.

It's rather hard to describe.

I'll have to explain in a somewhat roundabout way.

Have you ever been struck by a sudden desire for—soup?\*

HERAKLES. For soup? You bet! At numerous times in my life.

DIONYSOS. Am I making my point quite clear? Do you need more hints?

HERAKLES. Not as far as soup's concerned. I know it too well.

DIONYSOS. Well it's just as strong a desire that cuts right through me

For Euripides!

HERAKLES. *Euripides*, dead and buried?

DIONYSOS. Yes, no one at all could persuade me not to go

And bring him back.

HERAKLES. You intend to go down to Hades?

DIONYSOS. By Zeus I do, and further down too, if need be. 70

HERAKLES. But what's your motive?

DIONYSOS. I need a skilful poet.

The best are all now dead and the rest are no good.

HERAKLES. Isn't Iophon still alive?

DIONYSOS. That's the only bit

Of quality left, and even then there's some doubt.

I'm not quite sure what to make of Iophon's case.\*

HERAKLES. Well don't you want to bring Sophokles back instead

Of Euripides—if you really *must* fetch someone?

DIONYSOS. I can't do that till I've tested Iophon more

To see how he writes now Sophokles can't give help.

And Euripides, what's more, he's such a rogue 80

He'd be happy to try to escape back here with me,

While even-tempered Sophokles won't mind death.\*

HERAKLES. And Agathon—where's he now?

DIONYSOS. He's gone and left me—

He's a good poet, true, and someone his friends all miss.

HERAKLES. But *where's* the poor thing gone?

DIONYSOS. To a land of plenty!\*

HERAKLES. And what about Xenokles then?

DIONYSOS. He can go and hang!

HERAKLES. Pythangelos?\*[DIONYSOS *shrugs*.]

XANTHIAS [*aside*]. But no one cares about *me*,



While my shoulder chafes and chafes beneath this burden.

HERAKLES. Aren't there lots of other young kids around the place

Composing tragic plays—huge numbers of them, 90

And all with more gift of the gab than Euripides has?

DIONYSOS [*animated*]. But they're shrivelled grapes, producers of empty prattle,

And haunts of twittering swallows. They damage the art,

And as soon as they've staged a single play they vanish,

Content to have pissed on tragedy just the once!

You'll search in vain for a poet of *fertile* mind,

The kind who's able to voice great noble expressions.

HERAKLES. What d'you mean by 'fertile'?

DIONYSOS. The sort whose language contains

Such bold, ambitious utterances as these:

[*airily*] 'Aither, bedroom of Zeus', 'the foot of time', 100

Or 'a mind that refuses to swear a sacred oath

But a tongue that perjures itself without the mind'.\*

HERAKLES. You actually *like* this stuff?

DIONYSOS. It sends me crazy!

HERAKLES. It's a great big con-trick: you know very well that it is.

DIONYSOS. Don't try to inhabit my mind—just live in your own.

HERAKLES. Everyone can see these things are a load of rubbish.

DIONYSOS. I'll take your advice on *food*.

XANTHIAS [*aside*]. But what about me?

DIONYSOS. Well, the reason I came here wearing these clothes you see,

In impersonation of you, was so you could tell me

The names of people whose help I could call upon, 110

The ones you used when you went to fetch Kerberos.\*

So tell me the hosts you stayed with, the harbours, the bread-shops,

The brothels, the resting-places, the springs, the roads,

The cities, accommodation, and the women whose inns

Have the fewest bedbugs.

XANTHIAS [*aside*]. But no one cares about *me*!

HERAKLES. Are you really fearless enough to make the descent?

DIONYSOS. Don't try to object. Just tell me the fastest road

By which I'll find my way right down to Hades.

And I don't want a route that's hot, nor too cold either.

HERAKLES. Let's see then, which is the way that I'd recommend first?

120

[*Ponders.*] There's one that starts with a rope and a bench to stand on.

You could hang yourself!

DIONYSOS. No more of that—too stifling!

HERAKLES. There's another path that's direct and widely used.

You pound it in a mortar.

DIONYSOS. You mean drink hemlock?

HERAKLES. I certainly do!

DIONYSOS. That's too chilly and wintry a way:

It immobilizes your legs by freezing them cold.\*

HERAKLES. Do you want me to tell you a quick and downhill route?

DIONYSOS. By Zeus, yes please! I'm not very good at walking.

HERAKLES. Then take a stroll to the Kerameikos.\*

DIONYSOS. What then?

HERAKLES. Climb up the tower, that high one.

130

DIONYSOS. And what after that?

HERAKLES. Look down from there when they're going to hold a torch-race.\*

Then when you hear the spectators all shout 'Go then!'

At that point go yourself.

DIONYSOS. Go where?

HERAKLES. Straight down!

DIONYSOS. But that would make mincemeat of both halves of my brain!\*

That's not the way I want to go.

HERAKLES. Which one then?

DIONYSOS. The route you took yourself.

HERAKLES. That involves a long voyage.

Right at the start you'll come to a very large lake

Of unfathomed depth.

DIONYSOS. Then how will I manage to cross it?

HERAKLES [*gesturing*]. In a boat no bigger than this, a very old man

Will take you across if you pay him a fare of two obols.\*

140

DIONYSOS [*sighing*]. Good gracious!

How much two obols will buy wherever one goes!

How come this price reached Hades?

HERAKLES.

It came with Theseus.\*

After that you'll see great numbers of serpents and beasts,

The most frightening kinds.

DIONYSOS.

But don't try to scare me like that:

You won't put me off.

HERAKLES.

Then you'll come to a huge stretch of mud\*

And a river of shit. That's where you'll see submerged

Any person who's ever done terrible wrong to a guest,

Or has screwed a boy and stolen his money as well,

Or has thrashed his mother or broken his father's jaw,

Or has sworn an oath and perjured himself in the act—

150

[*with mock horror*] Or has had a speech copied out from

Morsimos' plays!\*

DIONYSOS. By all the gods they ought to add to those

Any person who's learnt Kinesias' military dance!\*

HERAKLES. After that the breath of pipes will waft around you

And you'll see the most beautiful light, just like on earth.

There'll be myrtle groves and groups of men and women

Ecstatic in celebration with clapping hands.

DIONYSOS. But who are *they*?

HERAKLES.

Initiates of the Mysteries.

XANTHIAS [*aside*]. Well *I'm* the proverbial donkey in the

Mysteries!\*

I refuse to hold this baggage a moment longer.

160

[XANTHIAS *starts belatedly to take the various bundles off his pole, and has almost finished by line 165.*]

HERAKLES. These people will tell you everything else that  
you need.

They live right next to the road that you'll walk along

And close to the doors of Plouton's palace itself.

Goodbye, my brother. [*Exits into house.*]

DIONYSOS.

Many thanks. Take care of

yourself

As well. [*To XANTHIAS*] And you pick up this bedding again.\*

XANTHIAS. Before I've put it all down?

DIONYSOS. And make it sharpish.  
 XANTHIAS. But please don't make me. Why not hire one of the  
 people  
 Who are joining the dead—there's surely someone who'll do it?  
 DIONYSOS. Suppose I can't find one?  
 XANTHIAS. Then use me again.  
 DIONYSOS. It's  
 a deal.  
 They're actually bringing a corpse along here now. 170

[From one of the *eisodoi* two CARRIERS come into view with a CORPSE on a bier. They start to make their way across the *orchêstra*. DIONYSOS watches for a moment then hails the CORPSE as the group comes near.]

Hey you! Yes it's you I mean, the one who's dead.  
 My man, are you willing to carry my baggage to Hades?  
 CORPSE [*sitting up*]. How much do you have?  
 DIONYSOS [*pointing*]. This much.  
 CORPSE. Will you  
 pay two drachmas?\*

DIONYSOS. I certainly won't. Much less.  
 CORPSE [*to CARRIERS*]. Please move on quickly.  
 DIONYSOS. Just wait a moment, my fellow—let's reach agreement.  
 CORPSE. If you won't pay the fee that I've stated, you're wasting  
 your breath.  
 DIONYSOS. I'll offer nine obols.  
 CORPSE [*sarcastically*]. I'd rather come back to life!

[*The CORPSE is carried away and off by the opposite eisodos.*]

XANTHIAS. What an arrogant bastard he was! Good riddance  
 to him!  
 [*Picking up the baggage*] I'll do the job.  
 DIONYSOS. You're an absolute gentleman  
 then.  
 Let's head to the boat. 180

[DIONYSOS and XANTHIAS resume their journey. As they do so, CHA-  
 RON on his ferry-boat (on wheels, pulled by a rope mechanism) starts to  
 come into view from the same *eisodos* by which the CORPSE has just left.  
 The boat moves into the *orchêstra*.]

CHARON. Pull in, bring her up to the jetty!

DIONYSOS. What's this?

XANTHIAS. Do you need to ask? It's the lake, by Zeus,  
The one that Herakles mentioned—[*pointing*] I see the boat!

DIONYSOS. So do I, by Poseidon! It's Charon himself right here.

[*Giddily*] Hello, Charon! Hello, Charon! Hello!

CHARON. Is there anyone here for the resting-place from troubles?

Anyone for the Plain of Forgetting or Hopeless Task,

Or Kerberos Town, Crows' End, or Tainaron Point?\*

DIONYSOS. Yes me!

CHARON. Get on board then quickly.

DIONYSOS. But where are you  
heading?

CHARON. To the crows!

DIONYSOS. What, really?

CHARON. As far as *you're* concerned!

Get onto the boat.

DIONYSOS [*to* XANTHIAS]. Slave, over here! 190

CHARON. No slaves!

Not unless he took part in the sea-fight to save our bacon.\*

XANTHIAS [*shiftily*]. Not me, I couldn't—my eyes were giving me  
trouble.

CHARON. Get on with it then, you'll have to run round the lake.

XANTHIAS. But where shall I wait?

CHARON. By the stone of Shrivelling  
Place.

There's a resting-point there.

DIONYSOS. Understand?

XANTHIAS. Yes, only too well.

[*As* XANTHIAS *starts to trudge off and exits by the nearest eisodos,*  
DIONYSOS *moves towards* CHARON'S *boat.*]

What a wretched existence! I was cursed by someone today.

CHARON [*to* DIONYSOS]. Sit down at the oar. [*Calling.*] If there's  
anyone else, hurry up.

What the heck are you doing?

DIONYSOS. What's wrong? I've done what you  
said.

I've sat on the oar—that's where you told me to sit.

[CHARON *now moves* DIONYSOS *so that he is sitting in a position to row the boat while CHARON steers it from the stern.*]

Get up and sit here instead, pot-belly!

200

DIONYSOS.

Okay then.

CHARON. Now stretch out both of your hands in front.

DIONYSOS.

Okay then.

CHARON. Stop fooling around! You have to *push* with your feet  
And pull the oar with real force.

DIONYSOS.

But how can I do it?

I'm not a sailor, still less a Salamis type,\*

And yet you expect me to row?

CHARON.

It's easy: you'll hear

Some beautiful songs when you start.

DIONYSOS.

Whose songs are those?

CHARON. The frog-swans' amazing songs.

DIONYSOS.

Then give me my

stroke!

CHARON. Pull—up—push! Pull—up—push!

[*As DIONYSOS starts to row and the boat moves back in the direction it came from, the FROGS appear from both sides of the stage, jumping in comically amphibian fashion and croaking loudly around DIONYSOS, who struggles to fit his rowing rhythm to their sounds and sings in competition with them.*]

[PARODOS I: 209–67]

FROGS.

Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

210

You children of marshes and springs,

With the pipe-tuned cries of our hymns

Let's proclaim our fine-voiced song.

Ko-ax ko-ax!

The same song which for Dionysos,

Son of Zeus and god of Mount Nysa,

We cried out in the marshes

When the hungover revellers

On the sacred day of Pots

Go in crowds through my precinct.\*

Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

220

- DIONYSOS. But *I'm* beginning to feel an ache  
 Right under my arse, ko-ax ko-ax!
- FROGS. Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
- DIONYSOS. But *you*, I suppose, don't care at all.
- FROGS. Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
- DIONYSOS. I hope you rot with your croak 'ko-ax'!  
 This croak 'ko-ax' is your constant refrain.
- FROGS. Why be surprised, old busybody?  
 I'm adored by the Muses who love good music  
 And by goat-hoofed Pan, who plays the reed-  
 pipes. 230  
 Apollo the phorminx-player delights in me too  
 For the reed-stalks which strengthen the frame of the  
 lyre  
 And grow in my watery marshes.\*  
 Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
- DIONYSOS. But *I'm* developing blisters here  
 And my anus has long been oozing sweat.  
 Any moment now it will peep out and say—
- FROGS. Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
- DIONYSOS. But o you song-loving species, 240  
 Please stop these sounds.
- FROGS. On the contrary  
 We'll raise our voices, the way in the past  
 On sun-drenched days  
 We leapt through galingale  
 And tufty reeds, taking great pleasure  
 In songs of copious splashings,  
 Or when to escape the rain from Zeus  
 We performed deep-water dances  
 With brilliant flashes of sound  
 And bubbling, spluttering poppings.
- DIONYSOS. Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax! 250  
 I've borrowed this cry from you.
- FROGS. In that case now we're heading for trouble.
- DIONYSOS. Not as much as *I* am, if rowing like this  
 I split myself asunder!
- FROGS. Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
- DIONYSOS. You can go and hang. Just see if I care.

FROGS. Well then we'll continue to shriek  
As much as our throats  
Can manage the whole day long.

DIONYSOS. Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax! 260  
You'll never defeat me this way.

FROGS. And nor will *you* defeat us either!

DIONYSOS. And nor will *you* defeat me either!  
You'll never do it. I too will shriek  
All day if I have to, until I succeed  
In proving supreme with my own ko-ax!  
Brékekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

*[In what follows, as CHARON's boat reaches the edge of the orchêstra, the FROGS hop back off-stage. After DIONYSOS has disembarked, the boat continues till it is out of sight. Shortly afterwards XANTHIAS reappears from the opposite eisodos to the one by which he left. The piper stops playing here and we return to spoken dialogue.]*

DIONYSOS *[shouting]*. I knew I was bound to stop your croaking at last.

CHARON. Stop rowing, stop rowing. Steer in to the shore with the oar.

Get out now. Pay me your fare. 270

DIONYSOS. Right, here are two obols.\*

*[Looking round]* Now, Xanthias! Where's Xanthias! Hey, Xanthias!

XANTHIAS *[appearing]*. Ho there!

DIONYSOS. Come over here!

XANTHIAS. Hello then,  
master.

DIONYSOS. Well where exactly is this?

XANTHIAS. It's darkness and mud.

DIONYSOS. So *did* you see the father-beaters round here

And the perjurers too, the way he described?

XANTHIAS. Didn't *you*?

DIONYSOS. By Poseidon I certainly did—*[peering at audience]* and  
I still see them now!

Right, what are we going to do?

XANTHIAS. It's best to move on,  
Since this is the place where he told us that beasts are lurking,  
The frightening ones that he mentioned.



DIONYSOS. He'll pay for such talk!  
 That was all pure bluster in order to make me afraid. 280  
 He's knows I'm a fighter but feels he needs to compete.  
 [*Lofitily*] 'There's nothing as self-important as Herakles is!'  
 I actually wish I could face a foe down here  
 And achieve some feat that's worthy of the journey.  
 XANTHIAS [*ironically*]. Of course you do! And indeed I can hear  
 a noise.

[*In the following lines XANTHIAS peers and points, with mock-terror, into the supposed darkness, while DIONYSOS becomes increasingly agitated.*]

DIONYSOS [*startled*]. Where, where?  
 XANTHIAS. Behind you.  
 DIONYSOS. Then get behind  
 me quickly!  
 XANTHIAS. No, it's now in front.  
 DIONYSOS. Then get in front of me quickly!  
 XANTHIAS. In fact I can see, by Zeus, a very large beast!  
 DIONYSOS. What kind?  
 XANTHIAS. A terrible kind. It's changing shape.  
 It was first a cow, then a mule, and now it's—a woman, 290  
 A ravishing beauty.  
 DIONYSOS. *Where?* Let me go and approach her.  
 XANTHIAS. She's no longer a woman. She's now turned into a dog.  
 DIONYSOS. It's Empousa then!\*

XANTHIAS. There's a fire that's lighting up  
 The whole of her face.  
 DIONYSOS. Does she have a bronze leg too?  
 XANTHIAS. By Poseidon she does! And the other is made of dung.  
 It's true.  
 DIONYSOS [*panicked*]. Then where should I run?  
 XANTHIAS. I'm thinking the  
 same!  
 DIONYSOS [*towards front row*]. O priest, protect me—I want to  
 drink with you later!\*

XANTHIAS [*as if to DIONYSOS*]. We're going to die, lord Herakles!  
 DIONYSOS. Don't call *me*,  
 I beg you please, good fellow, or mention my name.  
 XANTHIAS. Dionysos, then. 300

DIONYSOS. That's even worse than the other!

XANTHIAS [*as if to beast*]. Avaunt thee now! [*To* DIONYSOS]

Come over here, my master.

DIONYSOS. What for?

XANTHIAS. Take heart. It's all turned out okay.

We can say, just like the actor Hegelochos did:

'After stormy waters I see once more—a weasel'!\*

Empousa's vanished.

DIONYSOS. Do you swear it's true?

XANTHIAS. By Zeus!

DIONYSOS. And swear again.

XANTHIAS. By Zeus!

DIONYSOS. Once more.

XANTHIAS. By Zeus!

DIONYSOS. What a wretched business; the sight of her made me pale.

XANTHIAS [*pointing behind* DIONYSOS]. But this part here has turned a dark brown colour!

DIONYSOS. Well how have I found myself in so much trouble?

Which god's to blame for trying to ruin my life?

XANTHIAS. Blame 'Aither, bedroom of Zeus' or 'the foot of time'!\*

[*Abruptly*] But hey!

DIONYSOS. What's wrong?

XANTHIAS. Well didn't you hear?

DIONYSOS. Hear what?

XANTHIAS. The breath of pipes.

DIONYSOS. Oh yes! And I feel warm air

That wafts from torches with mystic atmosphere.

Let's stand back over here out of sight and listen.

[*As* DIONYSOS and XANTHIAS move back and stand at a corner of the stage building, the CHORUS processes in from an eisodos and starts to dance at 323 ff. They are a mixture of male and female: though dressed in ragged costumes, they represent ecstatic Eleusinian initiates who are celebrating in Hades in a similar manner as in the Mysteries themselves.]

[PARODOS II: 316–459]

CHORUS. Iakchos, hail Iakchos!\*

Iakchos, hail Iakchos!

XANTHIAS. Ah, now I know, o master. This must be where  
 The initiates that he mentioned are celebrating.  
 It's the Iakchos' chant they sing in the Agora too.\* 320  
 DIONYSOS. You're right, that's who they are. Our best plan then  
 Is to keep entirely quiet and find out more.

CHORUS. Iakchos, venerable lord who dwells in this place, *Strophe*  
 Iakchos, hail Iakchos!  
 Come join our dance in this meadow,  
 Come among the pious followers of your cult,  
 Toss wildly a head that's crowned  
 With a wreath luxuriant in fruit  
 Of myrtle berries, and stamp your foot 330  
 In rhythms bold for this unbridled  
 Dance-loving act of worship,  
 An occasion full of the Graces,  
 A sacred dance for pious initiates.

XANTHIAS [*excited*]. O mistress venerable, daughter of  
 Demeter,  
 What a lovely odour of pig flesh wafted this way!  
 DIONYSOS. Keep still then, please, if you want to get some  
 sausage.\*

CHORUS. Arouse the flaming torches you *Antistrophe* 340  
 brandish aloft,  
 Iakchos, hail Iakchos,  
 Our light-bringing star for nocturnal rites!  
 The meadow blazes with flames of gleaming torches.  
 Even old men's knees flex in dance.  
 They shake off all their cares  
 And the heavy weight of copious years  
 To join the sacred worship.  
 Lighting the way with your torch 350  
 Lead on to the flowering marshy ground,  
 O blessed one, our dance of rejuvenation.

[*The CHORUS halts in the centre of the orchêstra and their LEADER steps forward to chant the following section.*]\*

LEADER. I proclaim ceremonial silence now and demand all those  
 should depart  
 Who have no knowledge of what's said here or whose minds are  
 far from pure,  
 Or who've never seen our noble Muses' rites or joined in their  
 dances  
 Or those who remain outside the cult of Kratinos the  
 bull-eating god,\*  
 Or who take great pleasure in vulgar jokes at a time when  
 they're out of place.  
 And likewise with those who fail to avoid all forms of divisive  
 faction  
 But stoke it up and fan the flames for the sake of private profit, 360  
 Or when the city's enduring a storm take bribes while hold-  
 ing office  
 Or betray our defences on land or at sea, or export contraband  
 goods  
 From Aigina the way that Thorykion did, that damnable  
 tax-collector,\*  
 Transporting oar-pads and flax and pitch to enemy land,  
 Epidauros.  
 Or the person who plots to furnish funds for the fleets of the foes  
 that we're fighting,  
 Or the one who shits in Hekate's shrines yet composes dithyramb  
 lyrics,\*  
 Or the politician who tries to reduce the fees of dramatic poets\*  
 Just because he's been mocked in the ancient rites that belong to  
 the god Dionysos.  
 To all these people I now proclaim for a second and third time too:  
 Depart from our Eleusinian dances. But you who remain raise  
 your song 370  
 And prepare to perform the nocturnal revels that suit our  
 festival here.

[*The CHORUS moves into position for a further sequence of dance-songs.*]

CHORUS. Advance, each one of you, boldly *Strophe*  
 Into the blossoming bosoms  
 Of the meadowland. Stamp feet,  
 Aim shafts of ridicule,

Make merry with mocking humour.  
We have eaten enough for the task.

Follow the dance-steps and raise *Antistrophe*  
A noble cry for our Saviouress\*  
With voices of unison song,  
For she promises us 380  
She'll protect our land for ever,  
Whatever Thorykion's wishes!

LEADER. Come now, undertake further hymns of joy for our grain-  
bearing queen herself,  
The goddess Demeter. In loudest songs of worship give glory  
to her.

CHORUS. Demeter, mistress of holy rites, *Strophe*  
Come stand amidst our ranks yourself,  
Safeguard this chorus that is your own,  
And grant that all day long in safety  
We'll celebrate in play and dance.

And may we utter many jokes *Antistrophe*  
But many serious things as well, 390  
And may we serve your festival  
In a worthy spirit of playful humour\*  
And win the ribbons of victory!

LEADER. Come again, I say,  
And summon in song the handsome god to join us,  
The one who makes this choral procession with us.

CHORUS. Iakchos the venerable, inventor of loveliest song *Strophe*  
For this festival, accompany us  
On our path to the goddess. 400  
Show us how effortlessly  
You complete this lengthy journey.  
Iakchos, friend of dancers, escort me onwards!

It's you who to make us laugh (and keep *Antistrophe A*  
things cheap)

Gave us tattered sandals to wear  
 And nothing but rags.\*  
 You found a cost-free way  
 For us to play and dance.  
 Iakchos, friend of dancers, escort me onwards!

I took a glance just now at a young girl      *Antistrophe B*  
 here:

She had the prettiest face you've seen,      410  
 And was dancing beside me.  
 Her dress was ripped down the side  
 And a tit bobbed out!  
 Iakchos, friend of dancers, escort me onwards!

*[For some time DIONYSOS and XANTHIAS have been becoming visibly excited by the CHORUS's songs. They can now no longer restrain themselves but jump forward to make their own contributions to the increasingly high-spirited singing and dancing.]*

DIONYSOS. Well I myself like joining in!  
 I'd like to meet this girl  
 And play and dance with her.

XANTHIAS.      Me too!

CHORUS. Would you like us then together  
 To lampoon old Archedemos,\*  
 Who had neither teeth nor kin by the age of seven?

Yet now he leads the people  
 Up among the earthly corpses,      420  
 And holds first place in depravity up there.

I hear that Kleisthenes' son  
 Was seen among the tombstones  
 When plucking the hairs from his anus and  
 tearing his cheeks.

He flailed away, bent double,  
 And wailed and shrieked aloud  
 For someone called Fuck-you from Anaphlystos.\*

And Kallias, it's rumoured,  
 The son of one Horse-fucker,  
 Fought naval battles with cunts while dressed in  
 lion-skin.\*

430

[*The rhythms and steps of the preceding song continue even as DIONYSOS turns to more practical matters.*]

DIONYSOS. Could you give us some information?  
 We're looking for Plouton's palace.  
 We're visitors here who arrived not long ago.

LEADER. You don't have far to travel  
 And won't need to ask me again.  
 That's his very door you've reached just over there.

DIONYSOS. Get lifting then once more, slave.

XANTHIAS. What's that? You mean to say  
 It's the same old story again with all this baggage.\*

[*DIONYSOS waits for XANTHIAS to pick up all the bags one last time. During the following lines they make their way round the orchêstra towards the door of the stage building.*]

LEADER [*to CHORUS*]. Advance then 440  
 Through the goddess's sacred precinct, the flowery grove,  
 In playful spirits, participants in festivities that please  
 the gods.  
 I'll go to join the young girls and the women  
 In the goddess's all-night worship, and brandish this  
 sacred torch.

CHORUS. Let's make our way to the rose-filled *Strophe*  
 Blooming meadows,  
 With our usual customs 450  
 Of lovely dances  
 In playful spirits, which the blessed  
 Fates organize.\*

On us alone shine sunlight's *Antistrophe*

Sacred beams,  
 On us the initiated,  
 Who led pious lives  
 Attentive always to needs of strangers  
 And to ordinary folk.

[*The CHORUS, as though moving onwards in the underworld, now retires to the sides of the orchêstra. DIONYSOS and XANTHIAS have reached the door of the stage building.*]

DIONYSOS [*nervously*]. Let me think, what way shall I bang on this door before me? 460

I wonder how the locals round here do this.

XANTHIAS. Stop hesitating and just lay into the door

The way that Herakles would. Show some of his mettle!

DIONYSOS [*knocking*]. Hey, slave!

DOORKEEPER [*opening door abruptly*]. Who's this?

DIONYSOS. It's Herakles, the tough guy.

DOORKEEPER. You nauseating, shameless, audacious man,  
 You're loathsome—more than loathsome—as loathsome as hell!  
 It's you who kidnapped Kerberos, our dog.  
 You rushed away with your hands locked round his throat.  
 I was guarding him myself. But now I've caught you!

[*DIONYSOS collapses in a terrified heap; the DOORKEEPER declaims in melodramatic triumph over him.*]

The black-hearted rock of the river Styx itself 470  
 And the blood-dripping crag that looms over Acheron  
 Prevent your escape, with Kokytos' hotfoot hounds  
 And the hundred-headed viper who'll rend your guts  
 To pieces, while an eel from Tartessos  
 Will clamp itself on your lungs, and as for your kidneys  
 And the rest of your innards, they'll all be pulped to blood  
 And torn apart by Gorgons from Teithras deme!\*

[*Stiltedly*] I'll guide my hasty foot to fetch them now.

[*The DOORKEEPER turns and rushes back into the stage building.*]

XANTHIAS. What's the matter with you?



DIONYSOS. I've shitted myself: call  
a god!

XANTHIAS. You ridiculous thing! Get back on your feet at once 480  
Before a stranger sees you.

DIONYSOS. I can't, I'm fainting!  
Please give me a sponge; I need it—[*coyly*] to cool down my heart.

[XANTHIAS *takes a sponge from the luggage*; DIONYSOS *starts to rub between his legs.*]

XANTHIAS. Here, take it and rub.

DIONYSOS. Where is it?

XANTHIAS. O golden gods!  
Is *that* where you keep your heart?

DIONYSOS. It was so afraid  
That it made its way right down—to my lower bowel.

XANTHIAS. You're the biggest coward among gods and men.

DIONYSOS. What,  
me?

How come I'm a coward? I managed to ask for a sponge.

No one else would have done such a thing.

XANTHIAS. Well what would they  
do?

DIONYSOS. A coward would just have stayed on the ground with  
the smell.

But *I* stood up and wiped myself down, what's more. 490

XANTHIAS. What courage, I say, by Poseidon!

DIONYSOS. Well that's what  
I think.

But weren't you frightened yourself by his booming words  
And the threats that he made?

XANTHIAS. Didn't give them a moment's  
thought.

DIONYSOS. Right then, since you're keen to prove yourself so  
nerveless,

Let's see you play *my* role: you can take this club  
And this lion-skin too, if you're such a fearless-guts!

Meanwhile I'll take your part and carry the bags.

XANTHIAS. Well hand me your things at once; I'm happy with that.

[*They exchange costumes and accessories.*]

And look at me now—this Herakles-Xanthias!

You'll soon see if I'm a coward and spineless like you. 500

DIONYSOS [*sarcastically*]. You'll serve as Herakles' double—and ready for whipping!

All right, I suppose it's my turn to carry this luggage.

[*As they prepare to move on, the skênê door opens and SLAVE<sup>A</sup> enters from the palace of the underworld gods, mistakenly rushing to embrace the disguised XANTHIAS.*]

SLAVE<sup>A</sup>. You've returned, o dearest Herakles! Come on inside.

As soon as the goddess learnt you'd arrived down here,

She arranged for loaves to be baked and had several pots

Of pea soup boiled for you, got a whole ox roasted,

And had various cakes and breads prepared. Come on in!

XANTHIAS [*embarrassed*]. That's terribly kind, do thank her.

SLAVE<sup>A</sup>. By

Apollo, I won't

Just let you decline like this. She's also been stewing

Fine pieces of bird-meat and toasting lovely snacks 510

And mixing the sweetest wine for you to drink.

You really must join us inside.

XANTHIAS. No thanks.

SLAVE<sup>A</sup>. Don't be silly!

I simply won't let you go. There's a pipe-girl as well

In here, such a gorgeous young thing, and some other girls too

All ready for dancing.

XANTHIAS [*excited*]. What's that, some *dancing*-girls?

SLAVE<sup>A</sup>. They're in perfect youthful prime—[*gesturing*] and they've trimmed themselves!\*

So come on inside. When I left just now, the cook

Was finishing off the fish and the table was laid.

XANTHIAS. Go on then, tell the dancing-girls in there

The important man they're expecting is now on his way. [*Exit*

SLAVE<sup>A</sup>.] 520

[*To DIONYSOS*] Pick up the baggage then, slave, and follow me in.

DIONYSOS. Hey, hold on there! You can't be serious now.

It was only a joke to dress you in Herakles' clothes.

So stop this fooling around now, Xanthias.

Pick up the luggage again and carry it all.

XANTHIAS. What d'you mean? You surely don't intend to take back  
All the things you gave me before?

DIONYSOS. Just watch me now!

Take the lion-skin off.

XANTHIAS. I call the gods to witness

And ask them to lend me their help.

DIONYSOS. The gods? How funny!

You must be out of your mind to suppose that *you* 530

A mortal slave could become Alkmene's son!\*

XANTHIAS. Okay, I suppose you win. Take them back. But remember  
There may come a time, who knows, when you'll need me again!

[DIONYSOS *takes back the lion-skin and club and resumes the identity of HERAKLES. The CHORUS's dance involves gestures/motions towards DIONYSOS, who responds by contributing to the song himself.*]

CHORUS. This is the way a man should act whose *Strophe*  
Mind and wits are all alert and  
One who's sailed the seas a lot:  
Always go with the list of the ship,  
Keep to the side where things are safer,  
Don't just stand like a painted image  
Fixed in a pose that can't be changed,  
Switch your side instead and always  
Occupy the cushier station.  
That's the role of a clever fellow—  
Let's be blunt, it's *Theramenes*!\* 540

DIONYSOS. Picture how ludicrous the scene if *Antistrophe*  
Xanthias, the merest slave, should  
Find himself on Milesian bedding,\*  
Supine and kissing a dancing-girl, then  
Called for a chamber-pot while I was  
Watching his antics and all the time was  
Jerking away with my own little wink!\*  
Say this scoundrel caught sight of me, he'd  
Smash his fist right into my jaw and

Strike a blow that would knock right out  
*All the teeth from the front of my mouth!\**

*[From one of the eisodoi two female figures enter: INNKEEPER and her colleague PLATHANE, accompanied by SLAVE<sup>B</sup> and SLAVE<sup>C</sup>. They immediately spot DIONYSOS's lion-skin and club and approach him aggressively.]*

INNKEEPER. Plathane, Plathane, over here! Here's the scoundrel  
 himself,

The person who came to our inn some time ago 550  
 And devoured those sixteen loaves without paying.

PLATHANE. By Zeus,

It's the very same man all right.

XANTHIAS [*ironically*]. Here's trouble for someone!

PLATHANE. There was more besides—all that stewed meat he  
 managed to eat,

Twenty portions no less.

XANTHIAS. Then someone will pay for his crime!

INNKEEPER. And huge chunks of garlic.

DIONYSOS. Just stop all this prattle,  
 you woman!

You're making no sense.

INNKEEPER. Yes I am! And you didn't expect

That I'd recognize you while you're wearing these boots on  
 your feet.\*

And I haven't yet mentioned the piles of fish that you ate!

PLATHANE. No you haven't, my dear. And what about all the fresh  
 cheese

That he gorged himself on, even eating the baskets as well? 560

INNKEEPER. And when I tried to get him to settle the bill

He gave me the sourest look and started to bellow.

XANTHIAS. That sounds just like him! It's always the way he  
 behaves.

PLATHANE. He started to pull out his sword—we thought he  
 was mad!

XANTHIAS. I can just imagine, poor thing.

PLATHANE. We were so alarmed

That the pair of us jumped right up onto one of the roof-beams

While *he* rushed out, purloining some mats for good measure.

XANTHIAS. Oh yes, that's typical too.

INNKEEPER.

Now it's time to act.

[*to SLAVE<sup>B</sup>*] Hurry up and ask my patron, Kleon, to come.

PLATHANE [*to SLAVE<sup>C</sup>*]. And you must fetch Hyperbolos, if you can find him,

570

To help us destroy this man.\* [*Exit SLAVE<sup>B</sup> and SLAVE<sup>C</sup>*]

INNKEEPER [*to DIONYSOS*]. You filthy gullet,

How I'd love to take a stone and smash your molars,

The ones you used to devour all that food of mine!

PLATHANE. And *I'd* like to hurl you down in the criminals' pit!\*

INNKEEPER. And *I'd* like to take a sickle and cut out your throat,

The one with which you gobbled my sausages down!

I'm off to get Kleon. He'll come back here today

And issue a summons and tear this man to pieces.

[*The two women exit in haste.*]

DIONYSOS. I swear on my life, I love Xanthias more than the world.

XANTHIAS. Ah yes, ah yes, I see your ploy! Just stop it.

580

I refuse to wear Herakles' outfit again.

DIONYSOS [*wheeling*].

Please don't,

Sweet Xanthias!

XANTHIAS [*sarcastically*]. But how could a 'mortal slave'

Like me become 'Alkmene's son'? No chance.\*

DIONYSOS. I know that you're angry, I know it. You're right to be so.

I would even allow you to hit me—I couldn't object.

[*DIONYSOS starts to hand over the lion-skin and club a second time.*]

If I ever attempt to take back these things again,

I wish utter destruction for me and my wife and my kids—

And damnation on blear-eyed Archedemos to boot!\*

XANTHIAS. All right, I accept your oath on the terms you've stated.

[*XANTHIAS exchanges costumes again with DIONYSOS while the CHORUS re-enters the orchêstra to sing and dance, this time gesturing towards*

XANTHIAS, *who responds by contributing to the song himself.*]

CHORUS. Now's the time for further action,

*Strophe\** 590

Now you're wearing once again the

Costume that you had before.

Start to recover your dynamism,

Fix your face in a fearsome look that  
 Suits that hero, turned to a god, whose  
 Likeness you're adopting.  
 Don't betray yourself with nonsense or  
 Utter a word that suits a coward.  
 Any such lapse will mean one thing:  
 Lifting those bags on your back once more!

XANTHIAS. Wise advice you're offering, men. *Antistrophe*  
 Just this very same train of thought had  
 Formed itself inside my mind.  
 Even so it's clear to me that  
 Once he thinks it's in his interests, he'll 600  
 Try to take this costume back.  
 Nonetheless I'll do my best to  
 Let the world think I'm a hero and  
 See a menacing look in my eyes.  
 Time to adopt my pose—I hear the  
 Door behind me creaking open.

[*The skène door opens and the DOORKEEPER enters again, this time with two ATTENDANTS carrying a rope. In the by-now familiar way, he inevitably identifies XANTHIAS by his costume as HERAKLES.*]

DOORKEEPER [*gesturing*]. Tie him up straightaway, this dog-thief over here.

He'll pay for his crime. Hurry up!

DIONYSOS [*chortling*]. Here's trouble for someone!

XANTHIAS [*waving his club*]. To hell with you! Keep off!

DOORKEEPER. So you'll put up a fight?

[*Calling inside*] Hoy there, Ditylas, Skeblyas, and Pardokas,  
 Come straight out here and use as much force as you like.\*

[*Enter three more ATTENDANTS. XANTHIAS uses his club to resist arrest.*]

DIONYSOS. Well isn't this quite outrageous, to see this man 610  
 Using blows when he's caught as a thief?

DOORKEEPER. It's beyond the pale!

DIONYSOS. It's outrageous in the extreme.

XANTHIAS [*to DOORKEEPER*]. But I swear by Zeus

I've never been down here before—if I have, let me die—

Nor stolen a single thing of yours, not one crumb.  
 In fact I'll make you a rather generous gesture:  
 You can take and subject to torture this slave of mine.\*  
 If you find I've committed a crime, you can put me to death.

DOORKEEPER. What way should I torture him then?

XANTHIAS. *Every way: on  
 a ladder,*

Strung up, with bristle-whip lashings, or flaying alive,  
 Or tight on the wheel, pour vinegar into his nostrils 620  
 And crush him with bricks—any method you like! Just don't  
 Let him off with a smack from a leek or an onion-plant.

DOORKEEPER. What you say is fair. And if by using blows

I maim your slave, I'll promise you compensation.

XANTHIAS. No need to bother; just take him away for torture.

DOORKEEPER. I'll do it right here: you can see him answer the  
 questions.

[*To DIONYSOS*] Put down your stuff at once. Make sure you don't  
 Try to tell any lies to me.

DIONYSOS. I hereby declare

You can't torture *me*: I'm a god. If you dare to try,  
 You'll have only yourself to blame. 630

DOORKEEPER. What nonsense is this?

DIONYSOS. I'm a *god*, I assure you: Dionysos, Zeus's son.

And this is my slave.

DOORKEEPER. Do you hear?

XANTHIAS. I certainly do.

That's all the more reason to give him a really good whipping.

If it's true he's a god, then he won't even feel the pain.

DIONYSOS. Well since you claim yourself that *you're* a god,

Why not accept a beating the same as mine?

XANTHIAS. That makes good sense. [*To DOORKEEPER*]

Whichever of us you see

Start to shed tears first or flinching at all at the blows,

You'll be able to tell that this one can't be a god.

DOORKEEPER. That's very fair-minded of you, I can't  
 deny it. 640

You're prepared to follow what's right. Well, both of you strip.

[*DIONYSOS and XANTHIAS both remove their upper garments to bare*

*their backs. The DOORKEEPER takes a rope or whip from one of the ATTENDANTS with which to deliver the blows in what follows.]*

XANTHIAS. Now how will you test us fairly?

DOORKEEPER. That's easily done—

By giving alternate blows.

XANTHIAS. That sounds just fine.

*[DIONYSOS and XANTHIAS move slightly apart and bend forward in preparation.]*

Right then. Now wait and see if I flinch at all.

Have you struck me already?

DOORKEEPER. Not yet. *[He strikes now.]*

XANTHIAS *[faking]*. That's why

I feel nothing.

DOORKEEPER. Well I'll strike the other one now. *[He hits DIONYSOS.]*

DIONYSOS *[also faking]*. Will

you tell me when?

DOORKEEPER. I've done so already!

DIONYSOS *[nonchalantly]*. Then why did I not even sneeze?

DOORKEEPER. I can't explain. But I'll try the one here again.

XANTHIAS. Well hurry up please. *[The DOORKEEPER strikes harder.]* Agh, agh!

DOORKEEPER. Well what's that cry?

You surely weren't in pain? 650

XANTHIAS. Just getting excited

About the Herakles festival at Diomeia.\*

DOORKEEPER. This man's got the gods on his side. Now to *this* one again.

*[He moves back to DIONYSOS and strikes a harder blow than before.]*

DIONYSOS. Eee, eee!

DOORKEEPER. What's wrong?

DIONYSOS. I'm cheering the sight of  
horsemen.

DOORKEEPER. But why are you crying?

DIONYSOS. There must be some onions  
round here.

DOORKEEPER. So you're not concerned by the blows?



DIONYSOS. Not the  
slightest concern.

DOORKEEPER. In that case I'll have to go back to  
this other one here.

[*He now strikes XANTHIAS again even harder.*]

XANTHIAS. Aagh, aagh!

DOORKEEPER. What's wrong?

XANTHIAS. I've trod on a thorn—pull  
it out.

DOORKEEPER. What's happening here? Back again to the other  
one then.

[*He takes his time and delivers the hardest blow yet to DIONYSOS.*]

DIONYSOS. Apollo, help!—[*solemnly*] 'from your home in Delos or  
Pytho'.

XANTHIAS. He yelped with pain! You must have heard. 660

DIONYSOS. No I didn't.

I was simply quoting a satire by Hipponax.\*

XANTHIAS [*to DOORKEEPER*]. You're indecisive. What about  
a good whack to his ribs?

DOORKEEPER. I'll go one better—[*to DIONYSOS*] let's see that  
belly of yours. [*Hits him.*]

DIONYSOS. Poseidon, help!

XANTHIAS. There's someone in pain.

DIONYSOS [*suddenly singing*]. 'O you

Who control the Aegean headland  
And rule in the grey sea's depths'.\*

DOORKEEPER. In Demeter's name I'm quite unable to tell  
Which one of you is a god. So come inside.

The master himself will know how to recognize you, 670  
And Pherrephatta as well, since they're gods themselves.\*

DIONYSOS. That's a good suggestion you've made. I only wish  
You'd thought of it sooner, before I suffered these blows.

[*All the characters exit into PLOUTON's palace.*]

[PARABASIS: 674–737]\*

CHORUS. Muse, join us in our sacred dance-steps,

Come to be part of our song's delight,  
 Come where you'll behold great throngs of people,  
 Many thousands seated in their wisdom,  
 Every one more honourable than Kleophon\*  
 On whose lips of muddled speech  
 Is heard the raucous sound 680  
 Of a Thracian swallow  
 Perched amid barbarian branches.  
 It shrieks a mournful nightingale's song,  
 Announcing Kleophon's destruction—  
 Even if the votes are equal!

LEADER. Right and proper it is for us, a sacred chorus, to give  
 the city  
 Best advice and best instructions. First of all we think you  
 should  
 Treat all citizens now the same and take away the fears of some.  
 Those who may have done some wrong when tripped in  
 Phrynichos' wrestling-bouts,\*  
 Now's the time to let them leave their previous lapses in  
 the past, 690  
 Let them shed their former guilt and wipe away their old  
 mistakes.  
 Next, we think no one should live amongst us with their rights  
 curtailed.  
*That* seems shameful when compared with those who fought  
 in one sea-battle yet  
 Now, just like those old Plataians, are no longer slaves but  
 masters instead.\*  
*Not* that we're purporting to say there's anything wrong with  
 that, of course.  
 Praise we're happy to give you there: it's the only sensible thing  
 you've done!  
 Surely, though, you should be fair to others who've fought in  
*many* sea-battles,  
 Those whose fathers did the same, whose families form ancestral  
 stock?  
 They're the ones who ask your pardon: forgive them their misfor-  
 tune now.

Come, relent, give up your anger, all you whose natures make  
 you wise. 700  
 Let's agree to band together and count as kinsmen every one,  
 Give them all full citizen rights, provided they man our ships  
 and fight!  
 Pride and hard disdain won't serve us well while things stand as  
 they do.  
 'Tossed on stormy waves' our city's affairs hang in the  
 balance now.\*  
 Follow this good advice or else the future will show how foolish  
 we were.

CHORUS. 'If my eye is a steady judge of the cast of life'\*  
 And character of a man who's in for big trouble,  
 A certain monkey's mischief won't last much longer—  
 Kleigenes the diminutive,\*  
 Foulest of all bath-keepers 710  
 Who mixing their washing-powders control  
 Adulterated soda  
 And earthy detergent.  
 He'll soon be done for! And knows it too,  
 Which makes him full of aggression,  
 Afraid he may be mugged when drunk  
 If he goes without a big stick!

LEADER. Many's the time we've noticed something strange about  
 the city's ways,  
 Namely, how it treats those citizens who deserve to be thought  
 the best  
 Just the same as it treats old coins as well as the recent gold ones  
 too. 720  
*Those* were coins of solid value, no counterfeits of them were found.  
 Nowhere has there ever been a finer currency, all agree.  
 Only they were minted pure and always proved their worth when  
 tested;  
 All the world could count on them, Greeks and barbarians both  
 alike.  
 Now, however, they're obsolete, replaced by lousy coins of  
 bronze,

Recently minted, of no long standing, and stamped in the ugliest fashion as well.\*

Just the same with citizens too: those we know to be true-born and decent,

Those whose conduct is always just, the ones who deserve to be thought the best,

Men brought up in wrestling-schools and taught to dance and play music too,

*They're* despised. Instead the ones of 'bronze', the foreign and flaming-haired,

730

Those who lack all breeding in every respect, it's *those* we choose to employ,

Recent arrivals of just the sort the city would once have rejected outright—

Even to play the part of scapegoats would once have been too good for them!

*Please*, you idiots listening now, it's not too late to change your ways.\*

Choose to use the best men once again. If all then turns out well,

Praise will come your way. And if you fail, at least the wise will think

Swinging from a high-grade tree is consolation for the hanged!

[*The stage-door opens and XANTHIAS and SLAVE<sup>D</sup> enter in mid-conversation.*]

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. By Zeus the Saviour, what a decent man he must be,  
That master of yours.

XANTHIAS. But how could he fail to be decent?  
He's the type who knows nothing except for drinking and fucking.

740

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. I'm amazed he gave you no beating despite the fact  
That you, the slave, purported to be the master.

XANTHIAS. A beating? He would have been sorry!

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. Yes, that's the  
talk,

That's real slave spirit—the kind I like showing myself.

XANTHIAS. Do you really enjoy such things?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. It's a kind of rapture

When I'm able to curse my master behind his back.

XANTHIAS. And what do you feel as you mutter your private complaints

When he hits you then sends you outside?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

Oh I love that too!

XANTHIAS. And what about making *mischief*?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

There's nothing quite

like it!

XANTHIAS. You're my own flesh and blood! And when you hear  
your masters

750

In private conversation?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

I'm crazy with joy!

XANTHIAS. Then dishing the dirt about them to others?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

Oh yes!

That's such a thrill it makes me ejaculate!

XANTHIAS. O Phoibos Apollo, please give me your hand to shake.

Let's kiss each other as well. [*Turns round.*] Please tell me now,

By Zeus who's the god of whipping-boys like us,

What's all this uproar and shouting I hear inside

Like a quarrel?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

It's Aischylos and Euripides.

XANTHIAS. Well I never!

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

It's really a quite momentous affair

That's erupted among the dead in an outbreak of strife.

760

XANTHIAS. But what's the reason?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

A law exists down here

That for all the great sophisticated arts

The person who holds the highest esteem in his group

Should have special dining rights in the Prytaneion\*

And a throne right next to Plouton.

XANTHIAS.

I understand.

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. Until, that is, a superior artist arrives,

Someone who's better than him. Then he has to give way.

XANTHIAS. But why's that caused any trouble for Aischylos?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

He held the throne for tragic drama, that's why.

He was deemed the best poet at that.

XANTHIAS.

But who is it *now*?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

When Euripides came down to Hades, he started

770

To harangue the criminals here—the muggers and thieves,

The ones who'd beaten their fathers, the burglars as well:  
 There's a crowd of them all in Hades. And when they heard  
 His debating speeches, his verbal twists and turns,  
 They went quite crazy about him and called him the best.  
 He was so puffed up that he laid his claim to the throne  
 Where Aischylos sat.

XANTHIAS. But wasn't he pelted for that?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. Not at all, the crowd cried out for a competition,  
 To decide which one has the finer poetic art.

780

XANTHIAS. The crowd of riff-raff you mean?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. Yes, their shouts  
 thundered out.

XANTHIAS. But weren't there others who sided with  
 Aischylos then?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. Superior taste's in short supply—[*gestures at audience*]  
 like here!

XANTHIAS. Well tell me now what Plouton intends to do.

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. He's going to stage a contest and reach a judgement  
 By putting their artistry to the test.

XANTHIAS. But why  
 Didn't Sophokles too assert his right to the throne?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. He's not like that.\* He gave Aischylos a kiss  
 When he came down here, and grasped him by the hand.  
 He made it clear that he laid no claim to the throne.  
 But he said he was ready, just like Kleidemides,\*  
 To wait as reserve: if Aischylos prevails,  
 He'll stay in his place; if not, he'll enter the contest  
 And pit his art against Euripides then.

790

XANTHIAS. So it's really going to happen?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. It is, quite soon.  
 The whole tremendous commotion will take place here.  
 They'll actually weigh their art in a pair of scales.

XANTHIAS. What, you mean weigh tragedy just like  
 chunks of meat?\*

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. They'll bring out rulers and rods to measure their verses  
 And folding builders' frames—

800

XANTHIAS [*baffled*]. For making bricks?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. Set-squares and wedges as well. Euripides says  
 He'll scrutinize word by word his opponent's plays.

XANTHIAS. I imagine that Aischylos must be fuming with rage.

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. With lowered head he glowered in bull-like aggression!

XANTHIAS. But who will *judge* these things?

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>.

An awkward

question.

There's a shortage of expert men for them to choose from.

The Athenians weren't at all to Aischylos' liking—

XANTHIAS. I suppose he thought too many of them were scum!

SLAVE<sup>D</sup>. And he took the view that the rest of the people were  
useless

At judging poets. So then they picked your *master*:

810

The tragedian's art is one that he knows very well.

Let's go back inside. Whenever our masters are busy,

It's bound to mean there's trouble in store for *us*.

[*They go back into the palace through the central stage door.*]

CHORUS. Fearsome the wrath the loud-thundering one will feel  
inside

When he sees his antagonist sharpening all his  
loquacious teeth.

At that moment a surge of terrible madness will make  
His eyes start to swivel around in their sockets!

Great flashing-helmeted strife will follow among  
horse-crested words,

And screeching chariot axles will split into slivers of  
wood,

While one of these mortals, a craftsman of intellect,  
fights

820

Against the other's horse-galloping utterances.

Bristling the shaggy-necked hair of the mane flowing  
down from his head,

Contracting the fearsome skin of his forehead, he'll  
roar and release

Great bolt-fastened words which he's torn up like  
pieces of timber

With the force of a storm of gigantic proportions.

Then the mouth-manipulating assessor of verses, the  
 smooth  
 Curling tongue that controls the horse's bit with envy,  
 Will dissect words and subtly reduce to nothing  
 The heaving efforts of the other's lungs.

[*The stage door opens: enter PLOUTON, who will observe from one side till 1414; behind him come a haughty AISCHYLOS and an overwrought EURIPIDES, rushing on in mid-conversation with DIONYSOS.*]

EURIPIDES [*to* DIONYSOS]. I refuse to let go of the throne,  
 stop lecturing me.\* 830

I claim that I'm better than him in this art of ours.

DIONYSOS. Why this silence, Aischylos? You hear what he says.

EURIPIDES. He'll start with this supercilious pose! It's like

The kind of pretentious bluster he used in his plays.

DIONYSOS. I suggest, my man, that you tone down your words  
 a little.

EURIPIDES. I know what he's like; I saw through him long ago.

He's a poet who makes his characters wild and wilful,

His style's uncurbed, unruly, without any limits,

Devoid of slickness, verbosely vaunting its garbage.

AISCHYLOS. How dare you, 'son of a goddess who lives in the  
 fields'!\* 840

You abuse me like that, you collector of chatterbox talk,

Creator of beggars and rag-costume-stitcher to boot?\*

You won't get away with such words.

DIONYSOS. Stop, Aischylos,  
 'Don't let your intestines become inflamed with choler.'\*

AISCHYLOS. I've no intention of stopping before I've shown

The effrontery of this poet whose heroes are cripples.\*

DIONYSOS [*melodramatically*]. Bring out black sheep, my  
 slaves, bring out black sheep!\*

A whirlwind's on the point of bursting upon us.

AISCHYLOS [*to* EURIPIDES]. You collector of monodies written  
 in Cretan style,

And polluter of tragic art with stories of incest\*— 850

DIONYSOS. Please stop, o Aischylos, revered by many.

And you, o wretched Euripides, hide from this hailstorm,



Pull back, keep out of the way, if you've got any sense:  
 There's a risk he'll strike your head with a word of anger  
 So it splits wide open and out pours—*Telephos*!\*  
 And Aischylos, don't yield to anger, be mild.  
 Pose questions, be questioned in turn. But swapping abuse  
 Is not for poets but only for female bread-sellers.  
 You're roaring away like an oak-tree that's been ignited.

EURIPIDES. Well *I'm* quite ready—you won't see *me* pulling  
 back—

860

To bite and be bitten in turn. If he wants, I'll go first.  
 There's tragedy's verses and songs and sinews to test.\*  
 And by Zeus I'll offer my *Peleus* and *Aiolos* too,  
 And my *Meleager*—and on top of those, *Telephos*!\*

DIONYSOS. And what do *you* propose, tell us, Aischylos?

AISCHYLOS. I'd prefer this quarrel to take place somewhere else.  
 The contest isn't on equal terms.

DIONYSOS. Why's that?

AISCHYLOS. In my case what I composed hasn't died with me,  
 But *his* has died with him, so he'll have it to hand.

Nonetheless, since it's what you want, we must do these things. 870

DIONYSOS. Very well. [*Calling.*] Please bring me incense and  
 fire to burn.

Before the clever exchanges begin I'll pray  
 That I'm able to judge this contest with expert finesse.  
 [*To CHORUS*] While I do, I'd like you to sing a song to the Muses.

[*An ATTENDANT brings out a small altar, on which DIONYSOS burns  
 some incense while he makes gestures of prayer.*]

CHORUS. Nine maiden daughters of Zeus, you sacred  
 Muses, who look down on the subtly reasoning,  
 intelligent minds  
 Of these shapers of thought, when they come  
 together in strife  
 Pitting speech against speech in wrestling bouts  
 of cogitation,  
 Come here to behold the power  
 Of mouths so formidable at producing  
 Words an artist's tools have cut to size.  
 Now's the moment for wisdom's great contest

880

To move into action.

DIONYSOS. You two must pray as well before you speak.

AISCHYLOS [*adding incense*]. Demeter, goddess who nourished  
my mind and thought,

Please make me worthy of what your Mysteries teach.\*

DIONYSOS [*to EURIPIDES*]. You too must burn some incense.

EURIPIDES. I'd rather not.

There are different gods to whom I make my prayers.

DIONYSOS. You have personal gods, a new coinage?\*

890

EURIPIDES. I certainly do!

DIONYSOS. Go on then, make your prayers to your private gods.

EURIPIDES. O Aither, where I pasture, and Pivoting Tongue,

Astuteness, Nostrils keen to follow the scent,\*

Help me refute my opponent in all that he says.

[AGON: 895–1098]

CHORUS. We feel the most intense desire *Strophe*

To hear from both these clever men

Their finely choreographed words.

Begin to launch your verbal assaults!

Your tongues are ready for violent combat,

You both possess courageous spirit,

Your minds are primed for agile moves.

Our expectation is of course

900

That one will speak in elegant style

And language polished to finest finish,

While the other will tear up words like trees

From their roots and falling upon his foe

Will fill the air with a horse's thick dust-clouds of

verses.\*

LEADER. It's time to deliver your speeches now. Be sure to  
adopt a manner

That's full of wit and straight to the point and avoids  
repeating clichés.

EURIPIDES. As regards myself and the kind of poet my work  
reveals me to be,

I'll come to that at the end of my speech, but begin by  
exposing *him*.

I want to show what a charlatan and a fraudster he was in the  
theatre.

He kept on duping those stupid spectators who'd grown  
up with Phrynichos' plays.\*

910

At the start of each work he liked to produce a veiled figure to  
sit on the stage,

For example Achilles, or Niobe too: he wouldn't reveal their mask

But used them for purely showy effect, just stuck there  
brooding in silence.\*

DIONYSOS. I swear that's true!

EURIPIDES. But instead the chorus would  
dump great chains of songs,

Four lyric sequences strung together, with the characters stuck  
there in silence.

DIONYSOS. But I rather liked that silence, you know. It gave me  
just as much pleasure

As the figures who jabber in modern plays.

EURIPIDES. But *that's* because  
you were mindless,  
No doubt about that.

DIONYSOS. Well I rather agree! But why did this so-  
and-so do it?

EURIPIDES. Pure charlatanry! He wanted spectators to sit  
there on tenterhooks,

Not sure when Niobe's voice would emerge. And meanwhile  
the play plodded on.

920

DIONYSOS. The wicked old crook! And there was I, taken in  
by his fraudulent tricks!

[*To AISCHYLOS*] But why all this twitchy and peevish movement?

EURIPIDES. Because

I'm exposing his faults!

[*Resuming*] Then when he'd finished with all this nonsense and  
half the play had passed,

He'd give his character twelve huge words, each one as large as  
an ox,

And all of them shaggy with eyebrows and crests, like frightening  
bogey faces.

They were words that nobody understood.

AISCHYLOS [*roaring*].

I can't take any more!

DIONYSOS.

Keep

quiet!

EURIPIDES. His language was never remotely clear—

DIONYSOS [*to AISCHYLOS*].

Will you

please stop grinding your teeth!

EURIPIDES. But perpetual talk of Skamander rivers and ditches and emblems on shields

Of griffin-eagles in beaten bronze.\* His words were enormous crags

That were hard to interpret at all.

930

DIONYSOS.

By the gods, I can certainly

vouch for that!

I once lay awake the whole night long unable to sleep while

I puzzled

Over what kind of bird he might have meant by his phrase the 'tawny horse-cock'.\*

AISCHYLOS. It's a sign they painted on prows of ships—your ignorance knows no bounds!

DIONYSOS. Did they really? I thought that it must have meant Eryxis, Philoxenos' son.\*

EURIPIDES. Well why was it right to mention cocks in dignified tragic verse?

AISCHYLOS. You god-forsaken wretch, what about the things that *you* composed?

EURIPIDES. But I never mentioned horse-cocks for sure, nor goat-stags either, like you—

The sorts of things you see depicted on fabrics imported from Persia.

When *I* took over the tragic art from you, I found her condition Unhealthily bloated from constant bombast, all swollen with ponderous language.

940

So straight away I made her diet and removed that excess weight:

I slimmed her down with versicles and walks and lots of white beet.

I gave her the juice of babbling speech which I squeezed from the books I own.

Then I fed her up on monodic songs and mixed  
Kephisophon in.\*

I didn't just talk any nonsense I liked nor heedlessly jumble my  
words.

Instead, the character first on stage would start with a direct  
statement

Of the ancestry of the plot.

AISCHYLOS. Which was bound at least to be better  
than *yours*!

EURIPIDES. From the opening lines I would never allow any charac-  
ter just to be idle.

It made no difference what sort they were: so wives and slaves  
as well,

And masters and maidens and old women too—they all  
spoke the same.

950

AISCHYLOS. Then surely  
You deserved to die for such recklessness.

EURIPIDES. Not at all, in Apollo's  
name!

This way of writing was *democratic*.

DIONYSOS. Don't pursue this line, old  
chap.

It's not a direction of argument that promises well for you.\*

EURIPIDES [*points at audience*]. Moreover I taught these people  
here to chatter away –

AISCHYLOS. Too true!

But before you'd managed to teach them that I wish you'd been  
split down the middle!

EURIPIDES. And how to apply to language itself fine measuring-  
rods and set-squares,

And to think, to observe, to comprehend, to wriggle and always be  
crafty,\*

To cultivate a suspicious mind, to ponder all things—

AISCHYLOS. Yes, too  
true!

EURIPIDES. And I staged *domestic* affairs of the kinds we all habit-  
ually live with,

The sorts of things spectators know well. So *if* I'd got anything  
wrong,

960

They would have found fault with my artistry. But I didn't, like  
you, employ bluster

To distract their minds from serious thought, nor did I cause  
frissons of horror

With Kyknos-type figures or Memnons as well, whose horses  
have bells on their harness.\*

You can tell us apart by the kinds of men who are products of *his*  
plays and mine.

Phormisios belongs to him, and Megainetos the Phrygian:

All trumpets and lances and long beards they are, the sort who rip  
trees with their teeth.

But *my* disciples are Kleitophon and nimble Theramenes too.\*

DIONYSOS. Theramenes, hey? He's certainly clever and quick-  
witted too in all things.

If ever he finds himself in trouble or even comes anywhere  
near it,

He always escapes with a lucky throw—for him, nothing dicey  
goes wrong!\*

970

EURIPIDES. Well, that's the sort of cogitation

I introduced in the lives of these people,

By making reasoning part of my art

And enquiry too, which means they now ponder

And thoroughly grasp all manner of things,

Especially how to improve the way

They organize their domestic affairs

And constantly ask 'Well how's this going?',

'Where's such and such?', and 'Who took that?'

DIONYSOS. I swear by the gods we've reached the point

980

Where every Athenian enters his house

And shouts at the top of his voice to the slaves

With urgent demands: 'Now where's that pot?

Who's eaten up the head of that fish,

The sprat I mean? That bowl of mine

I bought last year is finished for good.

And where's that garlic from yesterday?

Who's nibbled away at the olives as well?

Yet in the past they were mindless dimwits

Who gaped as helpless as tiny babies

990

And sat there like nincompoops.

[While singing and dancing the following, the CHORUS gestures in the direction of AISCHYLOS.]

CHORUS. 'Beholdest thou this, noble Achilles?''\* *Antistrophe*  
 Come then, what answer will you give?  
 Be sure of this one thing:  
 Don't let your anger seize hold of you  
 And sweep you outside the chariot-tracks.  
 Terrible charges he's brought against you.  
 But even so, magnanimous man,  
 Don't let your reply be driven by anger.  
 Instead reduce your vessel's canvas,  
 Make use of merely the tips of the sails, 1000  
 Then gradually, gradually gather your speed  
 While watching out for the moment when  
 You catch a wind that's smooth and steady behind  
 you.

LEADER. O first of all Greek poets who built a tower of mighty words  
 And adorned a realm of tragic nonsense, be bold and spout your  
 speech.

AISCHYLOS. These circumstances fill me with rage, my guts are  
 wrenched with anger.

To think that *I* must respond to *him*! But in case he should say  
 I'm confounded—

[To EURIPIDES] Just answer me this: what kinds of things should  
 prompt our praise for a poet?

EURIPIDES. Sophistication and moral advice. And because it's our  
 task to improve

All the people who live in the cities of Greece. 1010

AISCHYLOS. So if you have  
*failed* to achieve that

And you took good people of noble mind and turned them  
 instead into rabble,

What penalty will you agree you deserve?

DIONYSOS. He should die! No  
 need to ask *him*.

AISCHYLOS. Consider then whether the sorts of people I passed  
 on to him at the start

Were of noble mind and stood tall and proud, not turn-and-run  
cowards in battle  
Nor vulgar loafers nor dirty tricksters nor rogues like people today.  
They breathed the spirit of lances and spears and headgear  
with flashing white plumes  
And helmets and greaves and mighty mettle of seven full ox-  
hides in strength.\*

EURIPIDES. Here we go, as I thought, with this awful stuff. He'll  
grind me down hammering helmets.

What actions of *yours*, could you please explain, taught the people  
to be quite so noble?

DIONYSOS. Answer him, Aischylos. Don't keep brooding in arro-  
gant, wilful rage. 1020

AISCHYLOS. I composed a play that was full of Ares.

DIONYSOS. Which one?

AISCHYLOS. The  
*Seven against Thebes*.\*

Every man who saw that play performed would have longed for  
a warlike spirit.

DIONYSOS. Well that's a terrible thing that you did! You made the  
Thebans become  
Far braver in war than they'd been before. And for that you  
deserve to be beaten.

AISCHYLOS. You Athenians too could have trained more for war;  
it's your fault, not mine, you chose not to.

Later on when I staged the *Persians* too I taught people always  
to want

To defeat their opponents, and at the same time I glorified what  
we'd achieved.\*

DIONYSOS. Yes, it gave me a thrill when the dead Dareios  
delivered a speech in that play

And the chorus immediately clapped their hands and chanted  
'iaui', 'iaui'.

AISCHYLOS. We expect our poets to do these things. Go back  
to the earliest times 1030  
And consider how all the noble poets have helped us to lead  
our lives.

We were taught by Orpheus mystic rites and how to abstain  
from killing.



Musaïos taught us cures for disease, and oracles too, while Hesiod  
Taught working the land, the seasons of crops, when to plough.

As for Homer divine,\*

Why else did he win such honour and fame if not by teaching  
so well

About army formations and valour and armour?

DIONYSOS. But he failed  
to teach Pantakles that,\*

The clumsiest man in the whole wide world. He was recently in  
a procession

And was trying to fasten his helmet on first before fixing the  
crest on the top!

AISCHYLOS. But he taught many other fine men nonetheless—  
brave Lamachos, just to name one.\*

My mind in turn was moulded by Homer; I wrote about  
heroes like his, 1040

The lion-heart types like Patroklos and Teukros. My aim was  
to rouse every man

To emulate great figures like them when the trumpet of war  
sounded out.

But I never created a whore like Phaidra, nor that other one  
too, Stheneboia,\*

And no one can name a woman of mine who suffers from  
sexual passion.

EURIPIDES. But that's because your work lacks Aphrodite's allure.

AISCHYLOS. A good  
thing!

Whereas you and yours fell victim to her in a quite spectacular  
way:

She crushed you down with all her force.

DIONYSOS. By Zeus, she certainly did!

All the things you'd written about other women afflicted your  
very own life.\*

EURIPIDES. What harm, you blackguard, was done to the city  
by women like my Stheneboias?

AISCHYLOS. You persuaded noble women, the wives of noble hus-  
bands as well, 1050

To poison themselves with hemlock, ashamed by *your*  
Bellerophon story.\*

EURIPIDES. But didn't the story I wrote about Phaidra exist already before me?

AISCHYLOS. It did, but still it's the poet's duty to draw a veil over evil

And not to stage or teach such matters. For just as smaller children  
Have a teacher who tells them things, so poets are teachers to  
those who are adults.

We've a serious duty to say what's best.

EURIPIDES. So when *you* use

mountain-sized words,  
Lykabettos in size or as big as Parnassos, is *that* then teaching  
what's best?\*

A poet should speak in a human voice.

AISCHYLOS. But we poets, you wretch,  
have to strive

To give birth to words that match the greatness of all our  
thoughts and ideas.

With characters too who are semi-divine you expect that  
they'll use bigger words,

1060

In the very same way that the clothes they wear are far more  
majestic than ours.\*

I set the standards in all these ways but *you* defiled them.

EURIPIDES. Just how?

AISCHYLOS. For one thing you dressed your kings in rags. You  
wanted to make them seem

More pitiful in the spectators' eyes.\*

EURIPIDES. What harm did I do by that?

AISCHYLOS. It's because of these things that nobody rich is  
willing to pay for a warship.\*

Each one of them wraps himself in rags and laments and  
claims to be poor.

DIONYSOS. By Demeter, they do, while wearing a thick woollen  
tunic beneath their rags!

When they've managed to take people in with their fraud, they're  
seen buying fish in the market.

AISCHYLOS. You've also taught people to cultivate bad habits of  
blather and chatter.

It's this which has emptied the wrestling-schools and worn  
away the buttocks

1070

Of all the young men immersed in their chatter.\* It's  
 persuaded the Paraloi too  
 To dare to argue with those in command: when *I* was alive, by  
 contrast,  
 They only knew how to call for bread and to shout 'yo-ho' from  
 their benches.\*

DIONYSOS. By Apollo, not half, though they also knew how to  
 fart on the rowers below them  
 And to smear their messmates' faces with shit and to nip onto  
 shore for some crime.  
 These days they argue and hardly row. The ships wander  
 round on their sails.

AISCHYLOS. What evils *hasn't* he helped to cause?  
 He's shown us women as go-betweens  
 And women in childbirth in sacred places 1080  
 And women who sleep with their very own brothers  
 And women who say that life is death.\*  
 The consequence of all these things  
 Is our city's now teeming with minor officials  
 And buffoons who serve as public monkeys  
 Deceiving the people at every turn,  
 And nobody's able to carry a torch\*  
 Since nobody trains in gymnasia now.

DIONYSOS. How true! I laughed myself dry of tears  
 At last year's Panathenaia. I saw 1090  
 A runner all hunched and moving so slowly,  
 White-faced and fat and lagging behind  
 In a desperate state. At the Kerameikos\*  
 The people standing there by the gate  
 Slapped his stomach and ribs and sides and  
 buttocks,  
 And feeling the smacks from the palms of their  
 hands  
 He started farting  
 And ran off while blowing his torch.

CHORUS. Momentous the issue, immense the strife, *Strophe*  
 intense the approaching war.  
 A difficult task to decide between them 1100

When one exerts its massive force  
 While the other can wheel around and resist with  
     vigour.  
 The pair of you mustn't remain in your camps.  
 Many the openings still for further attacks of clever  
     ideas.  
 So whatever resources you have for competing,  
 Speak now, advance now, anatomize  
 These subjects ancient and modern.  
 Both take the risk of speaking some subtle and clever  
     thoughts.

In case you're both afraid stupidity may     *Antistrophe*  
     prevent the minds  
 Of these spectators watching here                     1110  
 From grasping subtleties that you speak,  
 Feel no anxiety on that score—the situation's  
     changed.  
 These people are all old soldiers now,  
 Each of them has a book and understands  
     sophistication.\*  
 Their natures are strong in other respects  
 And now their wits are whetted.  
 So have no fear about that.  
 Launch an all-out attack in confidence that these are  
     clever spectators.

EURIPIDES [*to AISCHYLOS*]. Very well, I'm going to turn to your  
     prologues now.

[*To DIONYSOS*] I intend to take the opening part of a play     1120  
     And put to the test his supposedly skilful work.

He was always obscure in explaining dramatic events.

DIONYSOS. Which prologue of his will you test?

EURIPIDES.   A very large  
     number.

[*To AISCHYLOS*] But start by reciting that one from the  
     *Oresteia*.\*

DIONYSOS. Let everyone else keep quiet. Speak, Aischylos.

AISCHYLOS. 'Hermes below, watching over the father's power,

Become my saviour, my ally in time of need.

I come back to this land, returning from exile I come.'

DIONYSOS. Do you find any fault with these lines?

EURIPIDES. Yes, more than  
a dozen!

DIONYSOS. But the lines themselves don't add up to more than  
three. 1130

EURIPIDES. But each of the lines contains some twenty mistakes.

[AISCHYLOS starts to make rumbling sounds of indignation.]

DIONYSOS. Keep quiet, I warn you, Aischylos. If you don't,

I'll fine you more than these three iambic lines.

AISCHYLOS. I'm supposed to keep quiet for *him*?

DIONYSOS. If you take my  
advice.

EURIPIDES. He starts straightaway with an error as broad as  
daylight.

AISCHYLOS. You see what nonsense you speak.

EURIPIDES. I don't care what you  
think.

AISCHYLOS. What error d'you claim I made?

EURIPIDES. Recite it again.

AISCHYLOS. 'Hermes below, watching over the father's power—'

EURIPIDES. Well doesn't Orestes say this at the tomb

Of his father after he's died? 1140

AISCHYLOS. I don't deny it.

EURIPIDES. Is the point he's making that when his father had died

A violent death at the hands of his very own wife

In a secret plot, Hermes was 'watching over'?

AISCHYLOS. That wasn't his point. He called Eriounian Hermes\*

As protector of souls in the earth, and his words explained

That Hermes possesses this role as a gift from his father.

EURIPIDES. Then you made an even bigger mistake than I  
thought.

If Hermes possesses this underworld role from his father—

DIONYSOS. It would mean on his father's side he's a robber of  
tombs!

AISCHYLOS. Dionysos, the wine you drink has a nasty stench.\* 1150

DIONYSOS. Recite some more, [*to EURIPIDES*] while *you* watch out for the flaws.

AISCHYLOS. 'Become my saviour, my ally in time of need.

I come back to this land, returning from exile I come.'

EURIPIDES. He said the same thing twice, clever Aischylos!

DIONYSOS. How twice?

EURIPIDES. Consider the words, and I'll explain.

'I come back to this land', he says, and 'return from exile.'

But 'come back' and 'return' just mean the very same thing.

DIONYSOS. It's as if, by Zeus, someone should say to his neighbour

'Please lend me a kneading-trough—or a trough for kneading.'

AISCHYLOS. Not at all—you've been overwhelmed by his blather, you have!

1160

The two things don't mean the same. It's poetic phrasing.

EURIPIDES [*sarcastically*]. How's that? Do please enlighten me what you mean.

AISCHYLOS. 'Come back' is something that any inhabitant does.

It applies when no special circumstances exist.

But a man who's been in exile 'comes back and returns'.

DIONYSOS. I like it! But what do you say then, Euripides?

EURIPIDES. I flatly deny that Orestes returned to his home.

He came back secretly and without permission.

DIONYSOS. I like that too! But I don't really know what you mean.

EURIPIDES [*to AISCHYLOS*]. Continue the next bit then.

1170

DIONYSOS. Yes do, continue,

Keep going, Aischylos. [*To EURIPIDES*] *You* watch for faults.

AISCHYLOS. 'Upon the mound of this tomb I beseech my father

To hearken, to hear—'\*

EURIPIDES. Another example again!

'To hearken, to hear', it's blatant they both mean the same.

DIONYSOS. It's because he was calling the dead, you stupid bonehead!

We can't even make them hear if we call *three* times.

But how did *you* compose your prologues?

EURIPIDES. You'll see.

If you catch me ever repeating myself or find padding

That doesn't belong to the plot, you can spit on my work.

DIONYSOS. Come on then, speak. I really need to listen

1180

To the standards of diction your prologues exemplify.\*

EURIPIDES. 'A time there was when Oedipus was happy.'\*

AISCHYLOS. Completely false! He was damned when he came into being!

He must have been, since even before he was born  
Apollo foretold he was going to murder his father.

So how could a man like this have ever been happy?

EURIPIDES. 'His fortunes changed: he became most wretched of mortals.'\*

AISCHYLOS. Completely false! He was wretched right from the start.

It must have been the case, since when he was born

They put him inside a jar and exposed him in winter, 1190

To make sure that he didn't grow up to murder his father.

He came to Polybos' court with his swollen feet.\*

Later still, he married a woman much older than him—

And not just a woman, his very own mother in fact!

He eventually blinded himself.

DIONYSOS [*sarcastically*]. Ah, happy indeed—

Provided he served alongside Erasinides!\*

EURIPIDES. What nonsense you're talking. My prologues are beautifully written.

AISCHYLOS. I can't bear to continue this word-by-word dissection

Of every verse. With the help of the gods on my side

I'll use a miniature oil-jar to rubbish your prologues.\* 1200

EURIPIDES. A miniature *oil-jar* to deal with my prologues?

AISCHYLOS. Just one.

Your style of writing means any old object will fit—

A fleecetlet, a miniature oil-jar, a little old sack—

The iambic lines you compose. I'll show you at once.

EURIPIDES. Oh you will, will you?

AISCHYLOS. Yes.

EURIPIDES. All right then, listen to this.

'Aigyptos, so prevailing tradition relates,

With fifty sons traversed the sea by oar,

Put in to Argos and—'\*

AISCHYLOS. lost his miniature oil-jar!

DIONYSOS. What's the point of the miniature oil-jar? It's damned annoying.

Recite him a further prologue—let's see what it means.  
 EURIPIDES. 'Dionysos, equipped with thyrsos and wearing  
 fawnskins,

Among the pine-trees down Parnassos's slopes  
 Went leaping in dance and—'\*

AISCHYLOS. lost his miniature oil-jar!

DIONYSOS. Oh no, he's struck us again with this miniature  
 oil-jar!

EURIPIDES. I'm not concerned by that. Now *here's* a prologue  
 To which he won't be able to tag on an oil-jar.  
 'No man exists who's happy in all respects.  
 Perhaps born noble he falls in penury's way.  
 Or low by birth—'\*

AISCHYLOS. he loses his miniature oil-jar!

DIONYSOS [*confidentially*]. Euripides— 1220

EURIPIDES. What's wrong?

DIONYSOS. Let's lower  
 the sails.

This miniature oil-jar's about to blow a huge gale.

EURIPIDES. I swear by Demeter I'm not remotely troubled.

I'll show you now—I'll knock the thing from his hand.

DIONYSOS. Well recite another, but please avoid his oil-jar.

EURIPIDES. 'In ancient times, departing from Sidon his city,  
 Kadmos, Agenor's son—'\*

AISCHYLOS. lost his miniature oil-jar!

DIONYSOS [*to EURIPIDES*]. I beg you, friend, please *purchase*  
 the oil-jar from him,

To stop him from tearing your prologues to pieces.

EURIPIDES. You what?

You think I should buy this from *him*?

DIONYSOS. If you take my advice.

EURIPIDES. I certainly won't. There are numerous prologues of  
 mine 1230

To which he won't be able to tag on an oil-jar.

'When Pelops, the son of Tantalos, came to Pisa

With his dashing horses—'\*

AISCHYLOS. he lost his miniature oil-jar!

DIONYSOS. You see? He's managed to tag on the oil-jar again.

Please pay him his price, my good man—it's not too late.



You'll be getting a very fine oil-jar for only an obol.\*

EURIPIDES. I certainly won't, not yet. I've lots more prologues.

‘Oineus once from the land—’

AISCHYLOS.                      lost his miniature oil-jar!

EURIPIDES. Allow me first to get to the end of the line!

‘Oineus once from the land took abundant crops

1240

And making first sacrifice—’\*

AISCHYLOS.                      lost his miniature oil-jar!

DIONYSOS. What, in the act of sacrifice? Who filched it?

EURIPIDES. Ignore him, please. Let him try to respond to *this*.

‘Zeus, as we’re told by the truth of ancient reports—’\*

DIONYSOS. You'll finish me off! He'll say 'lost his miniature oil-jar'.

This oil-jar's now a wart on the face of your prologues,

Just like the styes that grow on people's eyelids.

Turn instead, in the name of the gods, to his choral songs.

EURIPIDES. I *will*! What's more, I'll prove that he's no good as well

At composing songs: he always writes the same thing.

1250

CHORUS. What's about to happen next?

Perplexed I am, I cannot imagine

What kind of faults he'll find

With a man who's composed so many songs,

The most beautiful ones of those we know

From all tragic poets who've lived.

Astounded I am and wonder how

He'll try to fault this man,

The bacchic master himself,

For whom I feel afraid.\*

1260

EURIPIDES [*sarcastically*]. Amazing songs indeed! We're about to find out.

I intend to condense all his different songs into one.

DIONYSOS. I'll take some pebbles and count the number you use.

[EURIPIDES *gestures to the aulos-player to accompany him, adopts a suitably parodic pose, and proceeds to sing a jumble of Aischylean lyrics in a ludicrously portentous manner.*]

EURIPIDES. Phthian Achilles, why, when you hear the man-slaying,

Alas, alas, toil of battle, comest thou not to our aid?  
Hermes our ancestor we worship, we the people round  
the lake.

Alas, alas, toil of battle, comest thou not to our aid?

DIONYSOS. That's two toils, Aischylos, for you.

EURIPIDES. Most glorious of Achaians, wide-ruling son of Atreus,  
hear me. 1270

Alas, alas, toil of battle, comest thou not to our aid?

DIONYSOS. A third toil, Aischylos, that was.

EURIPIDES. Sacred silence! Bee-keepers approach to unlock  
Artemis's temple.

Alas, alas, toil of battle, comest though not to our aid?  
I speak with authority of the destined power of men as  
they start their journey.

Alas, alas, toil of battle, comest though not to our aid?\*

DIONYSOS. Zeus king of the gods! I'm losing count of these toils.

The only thing I want is to go to the baths:

These toils have given me swellings around the kidneys. 1280

EURIPIDES. Don't go till you've heard another collection of songs,

This one constructed from nomes meant for kithara music.\*

DIONYSOS. Very well, continue, but please leave toil aside.

[EURIPIDES *continues in much the same manner, but this time introduces  
exaggerated vocal imitations of the strumming of a kithara-lyre.*]

EURIPIDES. When the twin-throned power of the Achaians, of  
Greece's youth,\*

Thrum-splat, thrum-splat, thrum-splat,  
Sends the Sphinx, the dog that presides over evil days,  
Thrum-splat, thrum-splat, thrum-splat,  
With spear and avenging hand a furious bird,  
Thrum-splat, thrum-splat, thrum-splat, 1290  
Leaving prey for dauntless, air-traversing hounds,  
Thrum-splat, thrum-splat, thrum-splat,  
The throng converging on Ajax,  
Thrum-splat, thrum-splat, thrum-splat.

DIONYSOS [*to AISCHYLOS*]. What on earth's this 'thrum-splat'  
sound and where did you hear it?

In Marathon's fields or the songs of a rope-hauling man?\*

AISCHYLOS. Not at all. My finest plays used the finest sources.

My poetic flowers were not those that Phrynichos culled:\*

I went to a different part of the Muses' meadows. 1300

[*Gesturing*] But *he* takes stuff from high and low: whores' ballads,  
 Meletos' drinking songs, plus Karian pipe-tunes\*  
 And dirges and dances as well. I'll show you right now.  
 Bring any old lyre—though come to think of it, why?  
 I'll dispense with that. But call that woman who plays  
 The potsherd castanets—Euripides' Muse!  
 She's just the right person to go with these songs that I'll sing.

[*Enter from the stage building EURIPIDES' MUSE, a down-market female performer with a pair of ceramic castanets in each hand. She writhes around in a louche manner during the parody of Euripidean lyrics delivered by AISCHYLOS.*]

DIONYSOS. Well here's a Muse who never found work on  
 Lesbos!\*

AISCHYLOS [*singing parodically*].

Halcyons, who by the sea's ever-flowing  
 Waves mouth all your blather, 1310  
 Dipping your wings in the moist  
 Liquid, bedewing their skin,  
 And you who in angles beneath the rafters  
 Sp-i-i-i-i-i-i-in with your fingers, o spiders,  
 Your loom-taut spool-threads,  
 A singing shuttle's exercises,  
 Where the pipe-loving dolphin gambols  
 Near prows with dark-blue ramming rods  
 In oracular fashion and in competition.  
 Gleaming glory of the vine's wine-flower, 1320  
 Grape-cluster's toil-ending tendril,  
 Throw your arms around, o child.  
 Do you see this dance-step?\*

EURIPIDES. I do.

AISCHYLOS. Well then, and this one too?

EURIPIDES. I do.

AISCHYLOS. And though you compose such things  
 You dare to find fault with *my* songs,  
 When your lyrics use a dozen contortions

That would suit Kyrene the courtesan?\*

Well that will do for your choral songs. But I want  
To take to pieces the style of your monodies too.\* 1330

[AISCHYLOS *starts to sing again, producing another mishmash of pastiche and partial quotations.* EURIPIDES' MUSE *continues to cavort.*]

AISCHYLOS. O Night's black-gleaming darkness,  
What is this anguished dream  
You send me, emerging from invisible Hades  
With a soul that is no soul,  
Black Night's shuddering child,  
Apparition horrendous,  
Draped corpse-like in black,  
Blood-filled, blood-filled look in its eyes,  
Possessing huge talons.  
Come, attendants, light me a lamp,  
Scoop dewy liquid in pitchers from rivers  
And heat the water,  
So I may ablute this god-sent dream. 1340  
Hail deity of the sea!  
Just what I expected. Occupants of the house,  
Behold these portents! My cock's  
Been snatched by Glyke, who's fled.  
Mountain-born Nymphs!  
O Mania, help me to catch her.\*  
Poor woman that I am  
I happened to be concentrating  
On my work, a spindle full of flax  
I was sp-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i in my hands,  
Producing thread, so that 1350  
At dawn I might go to the Agora  
And take it with me to sell.  
But my cock has flown, has flown up high  
On the lightest extremities of his wings,  
He's left woes, woes for me  
And tears, tears from my eyes  
I've shed, I've shed in my misery.

Come Cretans, children of Mount Ida,\*  
 Take your bows and come to my defence,  
 Agitate your limbs  
 As you surround her house.  
 And with you may Diktyнна, lovely child,\*  
 Bring her pack of delicate bitches and come  
 Through the palace in every direction. 1360  
 And you, daughter of Zeus, brandishing  
 Twin-flamed, blazing torches in your hands,  
 Hekate, light my way into Glauke's house  
 To guide my search for the stolen goods.

DIONYSOS. You must both now stop these lyrics.

AISCHYLOS. I've had enough  
 too.

I want to make him come to the weighing-scale challenge.  
 This alone will fully assess our talents as poets.  
 It's the *weight* of our words that will prove the definitive test.

DIONYSOS. Come here then, both, if I really have to do this  
 And treat the art of poets like cheese for sale!\*

[*During the following ode one of the ATTENDANTS brings out an enormous pair of scales and DIONYSOS starts to examine them before making the two tragedians take up position on either side of the equipment.*]

CHORUS. How meticulous clever people are! 1370  
 Here's yet another prodigious thing,  
 Unprecedented, full of absurdity—  
 Who else could have thought of it?  
 Upon my word, if anyone else  
 Had told me this, there isn't a chance  
 I would have believed him. I'd simply suppose  
 He was talking pure balderdash.

DIONYSOS. Right then, both stand beside the scales.

AISCHYLOS AND EURIPIDES. Okay.

DIONYSOS. Both hold a pan and utter a verse in turn  
 And don't let go till I give you the cuckoo's call. 1380

AISCHYLOS AND EURIPIDES. We're holding now.

DIONYSOS. Then say your  
 words in the scales.

EURIPIDES. 'If only the Argo's hull hadn't winged its way—'\*

AISCHYLOS. 'O river Spercheios and grazing lands of cattle—'\*

DIONYSOS. Cuckoo!

AISCHYLOS AND EURIPIDES. We've let go.

DIONYSOS. Well well, the  
scales have dropped  
On Aischylos' side.

EURIPIDES. But what's the reason for that?

DIONYSOS. It's because he put in a whole river: just like  
wool-sellers

He made his verse weigh more by making it moist,

While *you* put in a verse that was winged and light.

EURIPIDES. Well, let him quote something else and compete again.

DIONYSOS. Then hold the pans once more. 1390

AISCHYLOS AND EURIPIDES. Okay.

DIONYSOS. Now speak.

EURIPIDES. 'Persuasion has no shrine but speech itself.'\*

AISCHYLOS. 'Alone among the gods Death craves no gifts.'\*

DIONYSOS. Let go.

AISCHYLOS AND EURIPIDES. We've done so.

DIONYSOS. It's tilting to *him* again.

He put death in the scale, the heaviest evil we know.

EURIPIDES. But *I* put in persuasion—my verse is perfect.

DIONYSOS. But persuasion is something light and lacking in  
thought.

Try one more time to find a ponderous weight

Whose size and mass will tilt the scales on *your* side.

EURIPIDES. Now where, oh where can I find such a thing?

DIONYSOS. I'll tell you.

[*Facetiously*] 'Achilles threw—three dice, two ones and  
a four!'

1400

[*To both*] Please speak again, since this is the final weighing.

EURIPIDES. 'Hefted with the iron the club he grasped in his  
hand—'\*

AISCHYLOS. 'Chariot piled on chariot, corpse on corpse—'\*

DIONYSOS [*to EURIPIDES*]. He's managed to fool you again.

EURIPIDES. But how's he done it?

DIONYSOS. By placing in two chariots and two corpses,

Too much for even a hundred Egyptians to lift!\*

AISCHYLOS. Let him stop putting into the scales just lines of verse,  
 Let him, his children, his wife, Kephisophon too  
 All sit in the scales, let him take in his books as well.\*  
 I'll still outweigh him with any two verses of mine. 1410

DIONYSOS [*despairingly*]. These men are both my friends: I can't  
 choose a winner!

I've no intention of being at odds with either.

I think that one of them's wise, the other I like.\*

PLOUTON [*stepping forward*]. So it seems you won't achieve what  
 you came here to do.

DIONYSOS. But suppose I decide?

PLOUTON. You'll leave with one of these  
 men,

Whichever you choose—so your journey won't prove to be  
 wasted.

DIONYSOS. Such kindness! I wish you well. [*To the poets*] Now  
 listen to me.

I came down here to find a poet. And why?

To save the city and safeguard its festival plays.

So whichever of you is able to give the city 1420

The best advice, it's *him* I've resolved to take back.

Tell me first the view that each of you holds about

Alkibiades.\* The city's in pangs over him.

AISCHYLOS. Well what's the view of the city?

DIONYSOS. You want to know?

It pines for him yet loathes him but wants to *have* him.

But I need you both to tell me your thoughts about him.

EURIPIDES. I hate a man who'll always prove to be

Reluctant to help his homeland but quick to harm it—

A man who advances himself but hinders the city.

DIONYSOS. Hurrah for that, by Poseidon! [*To AISCHYLOS*] And  
 what's your view? 1430

AISCHYLOS. Don't rear the whelp of a lion inside the city. 1431a

Ideally don't rear a lion inside the city, 1431b

But if one's bred, be sure to tend to its needs.\*

DIONYSOS. By Zeus the Saviour, I just can't choose between them!

The one spoke wisely, the other in lucid style.

[*Thinking*] Look, each of you give me a single further idea

Which you think would help to promote the city's survival.\*

EURIPIDES. Suppose Kleokritos flew with Kinesias-wings\*

And he soared on currents of air out over the sea—

DIONYSOS. What a ludicrous sight it would be! But what's the  
*point?*

EURIPIDES. If they took with them vinegar jars, during naval  
battles

1440

They could spray the vinegar down in our enemies' eyes—

[DIONYSOS *seems about to interrupt, but EURIPIDES is determined to continue.*]

I know the solution. I'd like to explain it.

DIONYSOS. Go on then.

EURIPIDES. As soon as we start to trust what's now untrusted

And to lose our trust in what's trusted—

DIONYSOS. I'm baffled already!

Explain yourself in a clearer, less erudite way.

EURIPIDES. I mean the citizens whom we currently trust:

If we lost our trust in these but used instead

The ones we don't use now, we might be saved.

If our present leaders are bringing us close to ruin,

We'd surely be saved if we switched to the opposite ways? 1450

DIONYSOS. You're a true Palamedes, a genius, what a fine thought!

Who's idea was this: your own or Kephisophon's then?\*

EURIPIDES. It was mine—though Kephisophon thought of the  
vinegar jars.

DIONYSOS [*to AISCHYLOS*]. Well what about *you*?

AISCHYLOS. Tell me first

what kind of leaders

The city has now. Are they really the best?

DIONYSOS. You're joking!

It simply loathes such people.

AISCHYLOS. And *likes* bad leaders?

DIONYSOS. Well, not exactly—she has no choice but to use them.

AISCHYLOS. Then how could anyone save a city like this

When it doesn't know whether a cloak or a goatskin will fit?\*

DIONYSOS. That's the problem for *you* to solve, if you want to go  
back!

1460

AISCHYLOS. I'll say what I think back there, but not down here.



DIONYSOS. No, no, you can't. You must send up your help from down here.

AISCHYLOS. As soon as they start to believe that the enemy's land  
Belongs to themselves, while their own is their enemy's land,  
And believe that the fleet is their wealth, all their other  
wealth void.\*

DIONYSOS. I agree—though our juries consume all the wealth that we have.\*

PLOUTON. It's time for you to judge.

DIONYSOS. Well here's my judgement.

[*Solemnly*] I'll choose the one my soul desires to have.

EURIPIDES. Remember the oath you swore by the gods before  
That you'd take me home. Be sure to choose your friends. 1470

DIONYSOS. 'It's my tongue that swore'—but Aischylos is my  
choice!\*

EURIPIDES. What on earth have you done, you revolting person?

DIONYSOS. What, me?

I've judged that Aischylos wins—and what's to stop me?

EURIPIDES. Can you look me in the eye after being so shameless?

DIONYSOS. 'What's shameful if those watching don't think  
it's so?'

EURIPIDES. You brute, you mean you'll leave me to die like this?

DIONYSOS. 'Who knows if life is really the same as death',\*  
If breathing is eating, if sleeping is merely a blanket?

PLOUTON. Go inside, Dionysos, with Aischylos too.

DIONYSOS. What for?

PLOUTON. I'd like to feast you before you sail back. 1480

DIONYSOS. That's kind,

By Zeus, I don't object to an offer like that.

[DIONYSOS leads AISCHYLOS back into the stage building, followed by  
PLOUTON and, skulking behind them, EURIPIDES.]

CHORUS. Happy indeed the man who has *Strophe*  
Sharp astuteness in his grasp.  
Many the things that make this clear.  
Now his intelligence can be seen,  
*Aischylos* is the one who'll go home  
Bringing good to the citizens,

Bringing good, what's more, to his own  
 Kith and kin and friends as well,  
 All because he's astute in mind.

1490

Pleasing, then, not to sit around *Antistrophe*  
 Talking hot air with Sokrates,\*  
 Treating the Muses' work with contempt,  
 Spurning the most important things  
 About the art of tragic drama.  
 As for pretentious arguments,  
 Quibbles of nit-picking drivel:  
 Devoting an idle life to *those*  
 Is the mark of someone crazy!

[PLOUTON, *carrying a sword, some nooses, and a mortar and pestle, reappears from the palace door, leading out AISCHYLOS and DIONYSOS.*]

PLOUTON. Depart then, Aischylos, farewell! 1500  
 Your task is now to preserve our city  
 With good ideas. And educate  
 The stupid folk—no shortage of them!  
 Take this sword and give it to Kleophon,  
 And these nooses here for the revenue board,  
 For Myrmex and Nikomachos too,  
 And give this hemlock to Archenomos.\*  
 Tell them all to rush down here to me  
 Without delay. If they don't come quickly,  
 I swear by Apollo I'll treat them like slaves: 1510  
 I'll brand them and shackle them up together  
 With Adeimantos, son of Leukolophos,  
 And dispatch them to Hades at once.

AISCHYLOS. I'll do as you say. And you meanwhile  
 Please place my throne in Sophokles' care.\*  
 He must keep it safe, in case I return  
 Back here. He's the poet I judge to be  
 Next best in artistry to me.  
 But be sure the *other*—that scoundrel I mean, 1520  
 The peddler of lies who plays the fool—  
 Can't occupy that throne of mine  
 Not even by accident!

PLOUTON [*to* CHORUS]. Now light the way for him, you people,  
With your sacred torches. Escort him onwards  
With songs belonging to plays of his own  
And resounding chants.

[ATTENDANTS *have brought torches for the* CHORUS, *which sings its final song as it prepares to depart.*]

CHORUS. Grant as our first prayer a prosperous journey for this  
departing poet  
As he rises back up to the world of light, o deities  
beneath the earth,  
And grant to the city good thoughts productive of  
great benefits. 1530  
In this way we hope for a final end to our great  
afflictions  
And the grievous clashes of battle. Let Kleophon  
fight,  
Together with anyone else who wants, in his *own*  
ancestral fields.\*

[*Exit* CHORUS.]

- 1069 *Olympos*: the name here connotes not just the mountain (Index of Names) but the whole sky.
- 1103 *Gorgos* . . . *scribe*: Gorgos was evidently secretary (n. on 372–9) to the Council at this time or in the recent past but is not otherwise known.
- 1130 *Bringing words* . . . : the line is a quotation from Euripides, *Medea* 298.
- 1142 *holder of the keys*: the reason for the term is not clear but the keys imagined may be those to the treasury in the Parthenon; for Pallas as a cult title of Athena, see Index of Names.
- 1149 *mistress deities*: Demeter and Persephone; see nn. on 83, 282.
- 1158 *Come now* . . . : cf. n. on 319.
- 1168–9 *denounce* . . . *secret*: Euripides alludes to the same male stereotype of women's behaviour used previously by the Kinsman in his speech at 466–519; for the assumption that most Athenian males are away on military campaigns, cf. *L.* 99–104.
- 1195 *drachma*: probably a high price for a prostitute's services; cf. nn. on *C.* 21, 118, *F.* 173.
- 1200 *Artemisia*: the best-known holder of this name was the queen of Halikarnassos who accompanied the Persian Xerxes on his invasion of Greece in 480; cf. *L.* 675, with Herodotos 7.99, etc. But it here serves as an amusingly pretentious name for a disreputable bawd of the kind Euripides impersonates.
- 1230 *Thesmophoroi*: see n. on 282.

## FROGS

- 3 *hard-pressed*: i.e. by carrying a heavy load; Dionysos warns Xanthias off clichéd jokes about the physical labour of slaves. Cf. an ironic joke on the same Greek verb by the jester at Xenophon, *Symposium* 1.11.
- 13–14 *Phrynichos* . . . *Ameipsias*: three contemporary comic poets, the first and third both well established and successful; Phrynichos (cf. n. on *C.* 553–7) was actually competing against *Frogs* at this same festival with a play called *Muses*.
- 18 *a year*: a kind of temporal pun, since the major dramatic festivals were annual.
- 33 *sea-fight*: the battle of Arginousai in summer 406 (an Athenian victory but with heavy losses of men; cf. n. on 541), after which slaves who had fought for the city were given freedom and citizenship (cf. 190–1, 693–4).
- 38 *Centaur*: see Index of Names.
- 46 *saffron dress*: see n. on *WT* 138–9.
- 47 *boots*: high boots of a kind worn mostly by women (the same sort at *L.* 657, *AW* 346) but sometimes forming part of an 'effeminate' Dionysiac costume; cf. 557. The whole line resembles *WT* 136–40 and may echo the same Aischylean text as there (n. on *WT* 135).

- 48 *Kleisthenes*: see Index of Names.
- 49–50 *sea-fight* . . . *ships*: another reference to Arginousai (n. on 33).
- 52–3 *read to myself* . . . *Andromeda*: the context (on a ship) seems pointedly odd, but the line may still allude to the growing practice of reading plays in the late fifth century; cf. n. on 1114. For the *Andromeda*, see WT 1011 ff., with my Introduction to that play.
- 55 *Molon*: Dionysos probably refers ironically to someone (possibly a tragic actor) who was known for his considerable size.
- 62 *soup*: in comedy Herakles often had the persona of a glutton; cf. 107, 549 ff., with e.g. *W.* 60, *B.* 1583–90, and fr. 11 (Appendix).
- 73 *Iophon*: son of Sophokles and a tragic playwright himself for many years by this date. Sophokles had died a few months after Euripides in the second half of 406 (when Aristophanes was already writing *Frogs*). See my Introduction to the play.
- 82 *even-tempered*: our best evidence for Sophokles' personality is the vignette of him (going back to his contemporary Ion of Chios) at a dinner-party in Athenaios, *Dinner-Sophists* 13.603e–4f. Cf. n. on 788.
- 83–5 *Agathon* . . . *land of plenty*: for Agathon see Index of Names, with WT 29–265; the Greek puns on (i) the traditional idea of 'the islands of the blessed' (a privileged afterlife for a special few) and (ii) the luxury of the Makedonian court of King Archelaos, where Agathon was receiving patronage (as Euripides had done before him: n. on 953).
- 86–7 *Xenokles* . . . *Pythangelos*: for the former see Index of Names; Pythangelos was evidently also a minor tragedian, but is otherwise unknown.
- 100–2 *'Aither* . . . *mind*: on Aither see Index of Names; Dionysos (mis-)quotes from Euripides fr. 487 (see n. on WT 272), *Bacchae* 889, and (*very* loosely) *Hippolytos* 612 (cf. nn. on 1471, WT 275–6).
- 111 *Kerberos*: guard-dog of Hades, usually depicted as three-headed; Herakles kidnapped him as one of his labours. Cf. 187, 467.
- 126 *freezing them*: hemlock is depicted as having this chilling effect on Sokrates in the famous passage at Plato, *Phaedo* 117e–18a.
- 129 *Kerameikos*: lit. 'Potters' district', in the NW part of the city, including Athens' largest burial-ground (part of the joke here?); cf. nn. on 422–7, 1093, with *K.* 772, *B.* 395. The tower in line 130 cannot be identified for certain.
- 131 *torch-race*: a type of event, found in several Athenian festivals, in which the runners carried torches; some evidently started in the Kerameikos. Cf. 1089–98.
- 134 *mincemeat* . . . *brain*: the Greek puns on a word which can mean (i) a fig-leaf stuffed with food (including animal brains: cf. fr. 128, Appendix), (ii) a hemisphere of the brain.
- 137–40 *lake* . . . *obols*: the Acherousian lake (or Acheron, cf. 471), over which souls of the dead are ferried in Charon's boat (180 ff.). 'Two obols', a third of a drachma (cf. nn. on 173, *C.* 118), combines (i) a reference to coins put in

the mouth of the dead as a notional 'fare' for Charon's ferry, and (ii) an allusion to a daily dole paid to poorer citizens (on the proposal of Kleophon: see Index of Names) for certain periods during the later years of the war.

- 142 *Theseus*: mythological Athenian king/hero; he went down to Hades to help his friend Peirithoos and was eventually rescued by Herakles.
- 145 *mud*: this idea (cf. the Orphic beliefs at Plato, *Republic* 2.363d) may have been part of Eleusinian imagery; 'river of shit' is comic overkill (cf. fr. 156.13 in the Appendix).
- 151 *Morsimos*: minor tragic poet (and grand-nephew of Aischylos); cf. *K.* 400–1, *P.* 802.
- 153 *Kinesias*: see Index of Names; here apparently thought of as writing (bad) music to a type of dance in armour; cf. 366, 1437.
- 159 *proverbial donkey*: evidently denoting someone who does all the work without any reward; humorously harks back to the donkey in the play's opening scene.
- 165 *bedding*: part of the baggage consists of mats, pillows, etc., for sleeping on the journey; cf. slaves carrying bedding on a journey at Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.13.6.
- 173 *two drachmas*: cf. nn. on 137–40, *WT* 1195; no doubt a high price for a porter's service. Dionysos offers one-and-a-half drachmas (nine obols, 177).
- 185–7 *Plain of Forgetting . . . Tainaron*: the list of destinations jumbles traditional underworld geography, euphemisms for death, and a real place (Tainaron: the central S tip of the Peloponnese) where there was supposedly an entrance to Hades. 'Crows' end' links to the expression in 189 (for which see n. on C. 789).
- 191 *sea-fight*: see n. on 33.
- 204 *Salamis type*: the island of Salamis, off the W coast of Attika and location of the famous naval defeat of the Persians in 480, was a traditional source of good Athenian sailors/rowers; cf. *AW* 37–9.
- 215–19 *Nysa . . . precinct*: Nysa, a probably mythic mountain (outside Greece), was sacred to Dionysos. The frogs then refer to the third day ('Pots') of the Anthesteria festival, celebrated in the precinct of Dionysos 'in the marshes' (somewhere south of the Akropolis: Thucydides 2.15.4).
- 229–34 *Muses . . . marshes*: for the musical deities with whom the frogs identify themselves (as if they were in the 'high' tradition of Greek poetry) see the Index of Names. For Apollo's phorminx, cf. *WT* 327.
- 270 *two obols*: see n. on 137–40.
- 282 *There's nothing . . .*: an adaptation (with 'Herakles' for 'a man') of a line from Euripides, fr. 788.1 (*Philoktetes*).
- 293 *Empousa*: a bogey figure of Greek folklore with supposedly prodigious shape-shifting powers; cf. *AW* 1056 ('spook' in my translation), fr. 515 (apparently identifying Empousa with Hekate: cf. Index of Names).

- 297 *priest* . . . *later*: a priest of Dionysos (in whose shrine the theatre was located) was seated in the front row; Dionysos, as god of theatre, envisages a drinking-party (for the cast) after the performance. Cf. *A.* 1085–7.
- 304 *weasel*: the word is here a mispronunciation (a notorious slip by Hegelochos, a tragic actor) of a word meaning ‘calm seas’; the line is taken from Euripides, *Orestes* 279. For weasels as house-pets, see n. on *WT* 558–9.
- 311 *Aither* . . . *time*: see line 100.
- 316 *Iakchos*: a divine name invoked during the procession of initiates from Athens to Eleusis and sometimes identified (outside *Frogs*) with Dionysos himself.
- 320 *Agora*: see the Index of Names; the procession to Eleusis probably started from the Agora.
- 338–9 *pig flesh* . . . *sausage*: piglets were (probably) sacrificed on one of the preliminary days of the Eleusinian Mysteries; some scholars also detect sexual doubles entendres here (for piglets as female genitalia cf. n. on *WT* 237).
- 354–71 *the following section* [stage direction]: this section has something in common with the ‘anapaests’ usually found in the parabasis (see general Introduction, ‘Formality and Performance’). The parabasis proper in *Frogs* lacks such a section, as though it has been brought forward to this point, where it is a comic version of a proclamation (excluding the impure, etc.) made on the first day of the Eleusinian Mysteries.
- 357 *Kratinos*: the leading comic playwright of the period 450–420; cf. e.g. *A.* 849, *K.* 400, *P.* 700, with my general Introduction, ‘Aristophanes’ Career in Context’. ‘Bull-eating’ was a cult title of Dionysos: Kratinos is comically treated as the god of comedy (which is assimilated to a Dionysiac ‘mystery’ religion).
- 363 *Thorykion*: cf. 382 but otherwise unknown; presumably a real figure who had abused his position as collector of a 5 per cent tax on seaborne goods (see Thucydides 7.28.4) to sell contraband via the island of Aigina to Epidaurus in the NE Peloponnese.
- 366 *who shits*: a reference to an embarrassing/impious episode (actual or maliciously invented) involving Kinesias (n. on 153); on Hekate, see Index of Names.
- 367 *fees*: we have no other evidence on how much money playwrights received for having their plays performed at dramatic festivals, but evidently some payment was involved.
- 378 *Saviouress*: probably Athena, but just possibly Persephone.
- 392 *playful humour*: cf. 374–5, 404, 416 ff.; there were in fact several opportunities for laughter and mirth in the course of the Eleusinian festivities; but the chorus’s identity here is a sort of melding of Eleusinian and comic personae (cf. my Introduction to the play).
- 406 *rags*: some Eleusinian initiates deliberately wore old clothes which were

dedicated after the festival; cf. *We.* 845. The suggestion is that the producer of *Frogs* (Philonides) has saved costs by giving the comic chorus correspondingly cheap costumes.

417 *Archedemos*: a prominent politician at this date but here satirically accused of not being a legitimate Athenian citizen (hence not having been introduced as a young child into a traditional kinship group or ‘phratry’: see n. on 798); cf. 588. The Greek involves an untranslatable pun on growing teeth and belonging to a phratry.

422–7 *Kleisthenes’ son . . . Anaphlystos*: we know nothing else about the son of Kleisthenes (see Index of Names), here obscenely depicted in behaviour which mixes gestures of bereavement with a desire to be sodomized (probably as a prostitute: ‘tombstones’ hints at one of the seedier associations of the Kerameikos area of the city; cf. n. on 129). Anaphlystos was an Athenian deme, but the context activates a pun on a slang term for ‘masturbate’.

428–30 *Kallias . . . lion-skin*: Kallias was a member of one of the richest Athenian aristocratic families, a patron of intellectuals (Plato’s *Protagoras* is set in his house) but ridiculed in comedy (cf. *B.* 283–4) for a profligate, sexually scandalous life-style; his father’s name Hipponikos (‘horse-victor’) is changed to the obscene Hippobinos. Cf. frs. 117, 583 in the Appendix.

439 *same old story*: the Greek says lit. ‘Korinthos son of Zeus’, a proverb derived from the Corinthians’ harping on their divine founder; cf. *AW* 828.

453 *Fates*: see n. on *WT* 700.

470–7 *Styx . . . Teithras*: the Doorkeeper, with quasi-tragic rhetorical vehemence, mentions three underworld rivers/lakes (cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 10.513–14), before bathetically linking the Gorgons (snake-haired monsters, including Medusa: see n. on *WT* 1012), as though they were merely feisty human women, to the real deme of Teithras in E Attika.

516 *trimmed*: i.e. their pubic hair; cf. e.g. *L.* 89, 151.

531 *Alkmene’s son*: Herakles (Index of Names).

541 *Theramenes*: a politician with a reputation for side-switching adroitness; cf. 967–70. In 411 he helped both to set up and overthrow the oligarchy of the Four Hundred (cf. Introduction to *WT*): Thucydides 8.68, 89 ff. After the battle of Arginousai in 406 (n. on 33) he succeeded in pinning blame on the generals (six were executed: n. on 1196) for failing to pick up shipwrecked survivors, though he himself had failed to do so with his own ship. He was later part of the oligarchy of the Thirty imposed on Athens by Sparta at the end of the war; feuds within the group led to his execution.

542 *Milesian*: woollen fabrics from Miletos, a Greek city in Asia Minor, were prized for their fine quality (cf. *L.* 729).

545 *winkle*: the Greek here uses the term ‘chickpea’ in a slang sense.

546–8 *caught sight . . . mouth*: it is hard (one hopes) for a modern reader to get



- the humour of something which depends on imagining role-reversal in a scene in which a master violently punishes a slave for voyeurism.
- 557 *boots*: see n. on 47; the Innkeeper absurdly talks as though footwear could be the key to recognition of another person.
- 569–70 *Kleon . . . destroy*: see Index of Names for Kleon and Hyperbolos; they are imagined as (still) politically active on the side of ordinary people in Hades.
- 574 *pit*: see n. on C. 1450.
- 582–3 ‘*mortal slave*’ . . . ‘*Alkmene’s son*’: Xanthias ironically echoes Dionysos’s words at 531.
- 588 *Archedemos*: see n. on 417. The preceding line is, of course, an oath fit for an ordinary person, not a god.
- 590 *Strophe*: the metrical form of 590–604 corresponds to that of 534–48.
- 608 *Ditylas* . . . : all three names are probably parodic of non-Greek slave-names.
- 616 *torture*: Athenian law allowed the evidence of slaves to be adduced in court only if it had been extracted under torture; a defendant, as here, might offer his slaves as a supposed sign of his innocence. Cf. C. 620 and e.g. *We*. 875–6.
- 651 *Diomeia*: an Athenian deme just south of the city walls; the location of an important annual festival (at Kynosarges) in honour of Herakles.
- 661 *Hipponax*: late 6th-century author of vigorous satirical poems (*iamboi*) in which one can imagine a character exclaiming vehemently.
- 664–7 *Poseidon . . . depths*: Dionysos yelps with pain then tries to mask his reaction by quoting (loosely) from an invocation to Poseidon in Sophokles’ *Laocoon* (fr. 371).
- 671 *Pherrephatta*: another name for Persephone (Index of Names).
- 674 *PARABASIS*: here in a shortened form; see n. on 354–71, with my general Introduction, ‘Formality and Performance’.
- 678 *Kleophon*: see Index of Names; he is here depicted as of barbarian origin and in danger of being condemned in court even on a split vote (which in Athenian law usually produced an *acquittal*). Kleophon was in fact subsequently accused (and executed) by his political opponents on a dubious charge at the end of the war (Lysias 13.12, 30.13).
- 689 *Phrynichos*: a leading oligarchic conspirator in 411; see esp. Thucydides 8.48, 68, 92.
- 693–4 *those . . . masters*: another reference (see n. on 33) to the enfranchisement of slaves who fought at Arginousai, here compared with Plataians who had been made citizens of Athens after the destruction of Plataia (just to the NW of Attika) by Sparta in 427 (see Demosthenes 59.104).
- 704 ‘*Tossed on stormy waves*’: the phrase is taken from a poem by the 7th-century poet Archilochos (fr. 213 *IEG*).
- 706 ‘*If my eye . . .*’: a quotation from a tragedy by Ion of Chios (fr. 41).

- 709 *Kleigenes*: probably more than a bath-keeper; perhaps a political ally of Kleophon (678).
- 720–6 *old coins . . . stamped*: a reference to a change from Athens' traditional silver coinage (and some special gold coinage minted in 406) to inferior (probably silver-plated) bronze coinage; for later changes in coinage, cf. *AW* 815–22.
- 734 *idiots*: abuse of the audience is a stock element in Old Comedy (and affects the tone of the present passage); compare e.g. 276, 783, *C.* 1095–1102.
- 764 *dining rights*: in Athens such rights were bestowed on various people (certain politicians, officials, victorious athletes, and others); cf. e.g. *K.* 535, 766, *P.* 1084. Despite its name, the Prytaneion was not used by Prytaneis (see Index of Names).
- 788 *not like that*: this implies something similar to the idea of Sophokles' easy-going personality at 82.
- 791 *Kleidemides*: we have no idea who he was or in what sort of context he was supposed to have behaved in a manner analogous to Sophokles' attitude here.
- 798 *meat*: the reference is to a ritual at the Apatouria festival (cf. n. on *WT* 558–9), at which fathers weighed sacrificial meat before introducing their sons to the kinship group (phratry); cf. n. on 417, with fr. 299 (Appendix).
- 830 *the throne*: cf. 765–90. Some scholars think the chair was physically brought on stage (perhaps on the *ekkuklēma* or trolley: see the general Introduction, 'Stage Directions'), together with a throne for Plouton. But the text does little to encourage this view.
- 840 *'son of . . .'*: a distortion of Euripides fr. 885 (with 'fields' for 'sea') and a gibe at the supposed profession of the poet's mother (see n. on *WT* 387).
- 842 *beggars . . . rag-costume-stitcher*: Euripides had long had a (comic) reputation for creating tragic heroes (including Telephos: Index of Names) who appeared onstage as (disguised) beggars or in rags; cf. 1063, *A.* 412–34.
- 844 *'Don't let . . .'*: the line has all the hallmarks of an Aischylean quotation (fr. 468).
- 846 *cripples*: a running gibe against Euripides (see esp. *A.* 411, *P.* 146–8); one conspicuous case was that of Bellerophon (Index of Names), who in the play named after him fell from Pegasos and appeared onstage mortally wounded.
- 847 *black sheep*: sacrificed to avert a storm.
- 849–50 *monodies . . . incest*: monodies (solo songs) were characteristic of Euripides' later plays; see 944, 1330 (and the parody that follows it). Euripides wrote several plays with Cretan themes; cf. n. on 1356. For the motif of incest see 1081 with n. on *C.* 1372.
- 855 *Telephos*: Euripides' symbolic 'brains'; see Index of Names.
- 862 *sinews*: see n. 17 to my Introduction to the play.

- 863–4 *Peleus* . . . *Telephos*: *Peleus* probably dealt with the hero's life prior to his marriage to *Thetis* (cf. C. 1063–7) and his fathering of *Achilles*. For *Aiolos* see n. on C. 1372, for *Meleager* n. on 1240–1 below, for *Telephos* the Index of Names.
- 886–7 *Demeter* . . . *Mysteries*: *Aischylos* was born in the area of *Eleusis*; cf. Index of Names, s.v. *Mysteries*.
- 890 *coinage*: for gods as currency/coinage, cf. C. 247–9.
- 892–3 *Aither* . . . *Nostrils*: on *Aither*, which *characters* in *Euripides* sometimes treat as a god (e.g. fr. 941), see Index of Names. For *Tongue* as a quasi-sophistic deity, cf. C. 424. *Astuteness*: reclaimed for *Aischylos* at 1483, 1490. *Nostrils*: possibly implying contemptuous sneering.
- 904 *a horse's*: the reference is to a horse rolling on the ground after exercise to remove sweat; cf. n. on C. 32.
- 910 *Phrynichos*: an early tragic playwright (active c. 510–470), thus different from those mentioned in lines 13 and 689. Cf. 1299, *WT* 164.
- 912–13 *Achilles* . . . *silence*: the reference is to protracted dramatic silences by the main characters in *Aischylos*' *Myrmidons* (= the Thessalian tribe of *Achilles*) and *Niobe* (where the heroine mourned the loss of her many children, killed by *Apollo*).
- 928–9 *Skamander* . . . *eagles*: for *Skamander* see *WT* 864; the compound (and unique) Greek noun for 'griffin-eagles' was probably found in *Aischylos* (fr. 422).
- 932 'tawny horse-cock': a phrase from *Aischylos*' *Myrmidons* (cf. n. on 912–13), fr. 134; cf. *P.* 1177, *B.* 800. The hybrid figure in question was a kind of winged horse found in the visual symbolism of the late archaic period.
- 934 *Eryxis*: we know too little about this figure to guess why it was funny to identify him as a 'horse-cock'.
- 943–4 *books* . . . *Kephisophon*: *Euripides* was reputed to have a large private library; cf. 1409, with n. on 1114 for books more generally. For monodies, see n. on 849–50. About *Kephisophon* we know nothing for certain, but he is treated in comedy as a collaborator of some kind with *Euripides* and perhaps a member of his household (some later sources said a slave); cf. 1408, 1452–3, and fr. 596 in the Appendix.
- 953 *not a direction*: either because of some of *Euripides*' associates (see 968 with n.; and perhaps also *Sokrates*?, cf. 1492) or because he moved to the Makedonian court of *Archelaos* for the last part of his life (cf. n. on 83–5).
- 957 *crafty*: cf. *WT* 94. The ethos of *Euripides*' plays is characterized here as a sort of cross between philosophical questioning and neurotic suspiciousness.
- 963 *Kyknos* . . . *Memnon*: two victims of *Achilles* in the Trojan War; on *Memnon* cf. n. on C. 622. We do not know where *Kyknos* appeared in *Aischylos*, but *Memnon* was the subject of an entire trilogy of plays.
- 965–7 *Phormisios* . . . *Theramenes*: if *Phormisios* (probably a politician) is the

same man as at *AW* 97, the joke here may depend simply on his shaggy appearance; Megainetos is unknown. Kleitophon and Theramenes (see n. on 541) were two figures towards the oligarchic end of the political spectrum who also moved in intellectual circles (Kleitophon is present at the conversation in Plato's *Republic*: 328b, 340a–b).

- 970 *dicey*: there is a pun in the Greek on dice-throws and place-names which no one has satisfactorily decoded; but Theramenes' ability to escape from tight corners is clearly the basis of the joke.
- 992 '*Beholdest . . . Achilles?*': from the opening of Aischylos' *Myrmidons*, fr. 131, where the chorus beseech their silent leader, Achilles; cf. n. on 912–13.
- 1017 *seven full ox-hides*: an echo of the description of Ajax's shield at Homer, *Iliad* 7.220, etc.
- 1021 *Seven against Thebes*: produced in 467; it concerns the mutually fatal encounter between Oedipus's sons, Eteokles and Polyneikes (and is therefore hardly an encouragement to martial valour!).
- 1026–7 *Persians . . . glorified*: *Persians*, produced in 472, dramatizes Persian reactions to the news of Xerxes' defeat in the battle of Salamis; its 'glorification' of Athenian success is set against a partly tragic view of the enemy's sufferings. Dionysos's (approximate) recollection in 1028–9 of the scene involving the ghost of Dareios refers to *Persians* 681–851.
- 1032–4 *Orpheus . . . Homer*: various collections of poems passed apocryphally under the names of the mythical singers Orpheus and Musaios (the latter from Eleusis and occasionally treated as son of the former). Hesiod (c.700 BC) was author of, among other things, *Works and Days*, a didactic poem about farming. Homer's *Iliad* (c.700) could also be (naively) thought of as didactic in matters military.
- 1036 *Pantakles*: possibly a contemporary lyric poet of the same name.
- 1039 *Lamachos*: see Index of Names.
- 1043 *Phaidra . . . Stheneboia*: see Index of Names under Phaidra and (for Stheneboia) Bellerophon. Both women made false sexual allegations against men with whom they had fallen in love.
- 1048 *own life*: we do not have reliable biographical information to shed light on this apparently sexual allusion.
- 1051 *Bellerophon*: see Index of Names.
- 1057 *Lykabettos . . . Parnassos*: Lykabettos is a hill NE of the Akropolis in Athens; for Parnassos, see Index of Names.
- 1061 *clothes*: possibly a reference to theatrical tragic costume or to depictions in visual art.
- 1063–4 *rags . . . pitiful*: see n. on 842.
- 1065 *pay for a warship*: the costs of maintaining warships were charged to wealthy citizens as a form of taxation ('liturgy': see *OCD*<sup>4</sup> 850).
- 1070–1 *emptied . . . chatter*: the same charges brought against modern 'immoral' education at e.g. *C.* 1052–4.

- 1071–3 *Paraloi* . . . *benches*: the Paraloi were the rowing-crew of one of two Athenian triremes used for official state business; they had shown special loyalty to the democracy during the oligarch coup of 411 (Thucydides 8.86.9).
- 1079–82 *women* . . . *death*: the Nurse in *Hippolytos* acts as a go-between; the mother of Telephos (Index of Names) gave birth to him in a shrine in *Auge*; there was sibling incest in *Aiolos* (n. on C. 1372); for ‘life is death’, see n. on 1477.
- 1087 *carry a torch*: i.e. in a torch-race (cf. n. on 131) in the Panathenaia (see Index of Names).
- 1093 *Kerameikos*: cf. n. on 129, with n. on 131 for the torch-race in question.
- 1114 *a book*: this seems *prima facie* to refer to the availability of texts of (some) tragedies and the growing size of a ‘reading public’; but there is much dispute about exactly what we can infer from the passage. Cf. nn. on 52, 943–4.
- 1124 *Oresteia*: the trilogy (produced in 458) comprising *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*. Aischylos proceeds to quote from the second play, *Choephoroi* 1–3 (spoken by Orestes).
- 1144 *Eriounian*: a traditional epithet of Hermes (see Index of Names), but of uncertain meaning.
- 1150 *wine* . . . *stench*: Aischylos uses the idea of malodorous breath (ironically of the god of wine) as a gibe conveying general disdain.
- 1172–3 ‘*Upon the mound* . . .’: Aischylos, *Choephoroi* 4–5.
- 1181 *standards of diction*: the terminology here is related to contemporary studies in proto-linguistics and stylistics by Protagoras and other intellectuals; cf. n. on C. 659.
- 1182 ‘*A time there was* . . .’: the first line of Euripides’ *Antigone* (fr. 157).
- 1187 ‘*His fortunes changed* . . .’: Euripides fr. 158 (*Antigone*).
- 1192 *Polybos*: after being exposed at birth, Oedipus was brought up by Polybos, king of Korinth, and grew up mistakenly believing him to be his father; cf. Sophokles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 774, 827.
- 1196 *Erasinides*: one of six generals executed the previous year for failing to pick up survivors after the battle of Arginousai (see nn. on 33, 541).
- 1220 *oil-jar*: a small container (for oil and perfume) used by athletes and others. The humour of the following passage has been variously explained; apart from a charge of formulaic writing, there may be sexual innuendo (an oil-jar resembling testicles?).
- 1206–8 ‘*Aigyptos* . . . *Argos*’: Euripides fr. 846 (play uncertain).
- 1211–13 ‘*Dionysos* . . . *dance*’: Euripides fr. 752 (*Hypsipyle*). For Parnassos, see Index of Names.
- 1217–19 ‘*No man* . . . *birth*’: Euripides fr. 661.1–3 (*Stheneboia*: cf. n. on 1043).
- 1225–6 ‘*In ancient times* . . . *Agenor’s son*’: Euripides fr. 819 (*Phrixos*).

1232–3 *‘When Pelops . . .’*: Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 1–2.

1236 *an obol*: cf. n. on 137–40.

1240–1 *‘Oineus . . . sacrifice’*: Euripides, fr. 516 (*Meleager*: cf. 864). Oineus was father of Meleager; his failure to sacrifice to Artemis made the goddess send the Kalydonian boar, which Meleager killed, but with a sequel that led to his own death (cf. Homer, *Iliad* 9.529–99).

1244 *‘Zeus . . .’*: Euripides, fr. 481.1 (*Melanippe the Wise*).

1252–60 *Perplexed . . . afraid*: some scholars believe 1252–6 and 1257–60 are alternatives stemming from a partial authorial revision of *Frogs*; cf. my Introduction to the play, with nn. on 1431a–2, 1436 below. ‘Bacchic master’ associates Aischylos with Dionysos (see Index of Names).

1264–77 *Phthian Achilles . . . to our aid*: the farrago starts from Aischylos, fr. 132 (*Myrmidons*: cf. nn. on 912–13, 992) and repeats the second line (ungrammatically) as a refrain. Other phrases: ‘Hermes . . .’ = fr. 273 (*Psychagogoi*); ‘Most glorious . . .’ = fr. 238 (*Telephos*); ‘Sacred silence! . . .’ = fr. 87 (*Priestesses*); ‘I speak with authority . . .’ = *Agamemnon* 104.

1282 *nomes*: traditional songs for solo performance to the accompaniment of a large lyre (*kithara*).

1284 *When the twin-throned . . .*: the further farrago starts from *Agamemnon* 108–9, then continues: ‘Sends the Sphinx . . .’ = fr. 236 (*Sphinx*, a satyr-play), but with ‘sends’ transferred from *Agamemnon* 111; ‘With spear . . .’ = *Agamemnon* 111; ‘Leaving prey . . .’ = fr. 282 (play unknown); ‘The throng . . .’ = fr. 84 (*Thracian Women*).

1296 *Marathon . . . rope-hauling*: despite its great military associations, Marathon (see Index of Names) may have been thought of as a remote/rustic region of Attika; Dionysos also alludes to the simple songs of a workman operating a water-well.

1299 *Phrynichos*: see n. on 910.

1302 *Meletos*: identity uncertain; probably not the tragic poet(s) of frs. 117, 156, 453 (see the Appendix); ‘Karian’ here connotes the disreputably ‘foreign’ and vulgar (from a region of SW Asia Minor, a source of many Greek slaves).

1308 *work on Lesbos*: probably a double joke, implying (i) she could not find success in lyric poetry, (ii) she was not in demand for sexual services. The island of Lesbos had notable traditions of lyric (starting with Terpander, 7th century) but also a reputation for sexually expert prostitutes (cf. *W.* 1346, *AW* 920), though not usually ‘Lesbians’ in the modern sense.

1309–23 *Halcyons . . . dance-step*: a chaotic mélange of Euripidean and pseudo-Euripidean material, including fr. 856 (‘Halycons . . . skin’), fr. 528a, *Meleager* (‘exercises of a singing shuttle’), *Electra* 435–6 (‘Where . . . rods’), fr. 765a, *Hypsipyle* (‘Throw . . . child’). The protracted syllable ‘Sp-i-i-i-i-i-i-in’ (1314, cf. 1349) represents a musical mannerism.

1328 *Kyrene*: see n. on *WT* 98; there is some sort of comparison here between musical intricacy and sexual positions.

- 1330 *monodies*: see n. on 849–50. What follows is a continuation of the technique of 1309–23 but this one apparently involving more pastiche than quotation: a stream-of-consciousness monody, neurotic in manner yet about a banal incident (the theft of a cockerel), and correspondingly jumbling high and low linguistic registers.
- 1345 *Mania*: a female slave-name.
- 1356 *Come Cretans* . . . : from Euripides' *Cretans* (fr. 472 f), a play dealing with the consequences of the birth of the minotaur to Pasiphae after her mating with Minos' bull. 'Bows' in the next line reflects a specialist Cretan military tradition of archery (e.g. Thucydides 6.25.2).
- 1358 *Diklynnna*: the name sometimes of a Cretan nymph but here probably an epithet of the goddess Artemis (see Index of Names).
- 1369 *like cheese*: compare Xanthias's similar sarcasm at 798.
- 1382 *If only* . . . : Euripides, *Medea* 1; the *Argo* was the ship that took the Argonauts to the Black Sea.
- 1383 *'O river Spercheios* . . . : Aischylos, fr. 249 (*Philoktetes*). The Spercheios, in central Greece, flows into the Malian Gulf.
- 1391 *'Persuasion has* . . . : Euripides, fr. 170.1 (*Antigone*).
- 1392 *Alone among* . . . : Aischylos, fr. 161.1 (*Niobe*).
- 1400 *Achilles threw* . . . : the start of the line is presumably from Euripides, but Dionysos creates the expectation of something weighty, only to make a joke out of throwing dice (which Achilles is shown doing in various Greek vase-paintings).
- 1402 *'Hefted . . . hand'*: Euripides, fr. 531 (*Meleager*).
- 1403 *'Chariot piled on chariot* . . . : Aischylos, fr. 38.1 (*Glaukos Potnieus*).
- 1406 *Egyptians*: reflecting Greek awareness of the scale of certain Egyptian monuments; cf. *B.* 1133–4.
- 1408–9 *Kephisophon* . . . *books*: see n. on 943–4.
- 1413 *one . . . the other*: this line (and likewise 1433) has been a source of unending disagreement; what matters most is that Dionysos is acknowledging poetic value in both playwrights (cf. my Introduction to the play).
- 1423 *Alkibiades*: one of the most controversial of Athenian politicians, who spent much of the period 415–407 working against Athens with the Spartans and/or Persians. Opinion in the city had long been divided over him (cf. esp. Xenophon, *Hellenika* 1.4.13–17, referring to 407). See *OCD*<sup>2</sup> 52–3.
- 1431a–2 *Don't rear . . . needs*: speculatively treated by some as a fragment of Aischylos (fr. 452), but more likely just a comic allusion to the famous Aischylean choral image at *Agamemnon* 717–36. Lines 1431a and 1431b appear to be alternative versions; cf. n. on 1252–60.
- 1436 *city's survival*: for this theme, cf. my Introduction to the play. From here to 1466 there are several vexed textual questions about the order of lines

and the attribution of lines to speakers: compare nn. on 1252–60, 1431a–2. Most modern editors change the order of lines and/or posit more than one version of the play (see my Introduction); but since all remedies are debatable and there is no strong consensus, I retain the transmitted line-order.

- 1437 *Kleokritos* . . . *Kinesias*: probably fat and thin respectively (cf. *B.* 876, 1378); on the latter, see the Index of Names.
- 1451–2 *Palamedes* . . . *Kephisophon*: on the former see Index of Names with *WT* 769 ff., on the latter n. on 943–4.
- 1459 *a cloak or a goatskin*: probably proverbial for making a basic choice between alternatives.
- 1463–5 *enemy's land* . . . *the fleet*: i.e. a military policy, similar to that of Perikles at the start of the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides 1.142–3, 2.13.2), of using the Athenian fleet to raid enemy territory while allowing Sparta to make incursions into Attika.
- 1466 *our juries*: the expense of the Athenian jury system (with daily pay for serving jurors: cf. n. on *C.* 864) had long been politically contentious; cf. *W.* 656–63 (read by some as ironic).
- 1471 *'tongue that swore'*: the first half of Euripides, *Hippolytos* 612; cf. n. on 100–2.
- 1475 *'What's shameful . . . ?'*: Euripides, fr. 19 (*Aiolos*), with 'those watching' (alluding to the theatre audience) substituted for 'those involved in it'.
- 1477 *'Who knows . . . death?'*: Euripides, fr. 638 (*Polyidos*); cf. line 1082.
- 1492 *with Sokrates*: Euripides had at least a comic reputation for being an intellectualizing acquaintance of Sokrates (see Index of Names), even for receiving poetic help from him (see fr. 392 in the Appendix). The motifs in the following lines, 'treating the Muses' work . . .' and 'nit-picking drivel', seem aimed more at Sokrates himself than at Euripides.
- 1504–7 *Kleophon* . . . *Archenomos*: on Kleophon see Index of Names; oddly, Nikomachos (a legal official) was later accused by some of having caused Kleophon's death (Lysias 30.13); Myrmex and Archenomos are otherwise unknown.
- 1516 *Sophokles*: cf. 787–94.
- 1532–3 *Kleophon* . . . *ancestral*: a reprise of the gibe at 678–82.



## INDEX OF NAMES

Listed here are those proper names (excluding the purely fictional) of people, places, and institutions that are not glossed in the Explanatory Notes. References are selective; fragments of Aristophanes cited here are mentioned in the Appendix. Capitals within entries indicate cross-references. For abbreviations of play-titles see p. 255.

- AGATHON (c. 445–c. 400), Athenian tragic poet; treated as effeminate in person (*WT* 29–35, 191–2) and, somewhat like EURIPIDES (cf. *WT* 187), stylistically ‘modern’ in his work, with mannered lyrics (*WT* 101–29) and some rhetorical features (fr. 341); he eventually left Athens for (and died at) the Makedonian court (*F.* 83–5)
- AGORA, civic centre of Athens, a general social meeting-place (*C.* 991, 1003, *WT* 578) but also containing courts, other official buildings, temples, and shops (*F.* 1350, *WT* 457)
- AISCHYLOS (c. 525–456), the greatest of early Athenian tragic poets, but found difficult and old-fashioned by some in the later fifth century (*C.* 1365–7); his plays were associated with values of poetic grandeur, military heroism, elaborate choral lyrics, and portentous atmosphere (*F.* 814–1533 *passim*)
- AITHER, traditional poetic term (a quasi-divinity at Hesiod, *Theogony* 124) for the upper regions of the air (*C.* 285, *WT* 43), semi-deified by Sokrates and the Clouds (*C.* 265, 570) and by Euripides (*WT* 272, *F.* 100), who also speaks of it as a cosmogonic force (*WT* 14)
- AKROPOLIS, limestone citadel, the original location of settlement at Athens, and in the classical period its major religious centre, particularly sacred to ATHENA (*C.* 602), site of Parthenon and other temples/shrines, including the Thesmophorion (*WT* 83, 281), and final destination of the PANATHE-NAIA procession (*C.* 69, *WT* 812)
- APOLLO, son of Leto (*WT* 129), born on DELOS, brother of ARTEMIS, god of music/song (*WT* 111–12, 969, *F.* 231–2) and prophecy (*F.* 1184), with major oracle at Delphi; sometimes titled PHOIBOS (*WT* 109–12)
- ARTEMIS, virgin goddess of hunting and wild animals (*WT* 114–19, 971), daughter of ZEUS and Leto (*F.* 321), twin-sister of APOLLO; women swear oaths by her (e.g. *WT* 517, 569, 742); sometimes associated with bees (*F.* 1273)
- ASSEMBLY (*ekklêsia*), the sovereign citizen body of the Athenian democracy; it met several times a month on the Pnyx (*WT* 658) and proposals were put to it, before being voted on, by individual speakers (*C.* 432–3, 1019); the women’s assembly in *WT* is in part parodic of its procedures
- ATHENA, daughter of ZEUS, patron-goddess of Athens, a virgin (*WT* 317, 1139), worshipped especially on the AKROPOLIS and typically depicted

as a warrior (*WT* 318); her cult titles included PALLAS, her traditional epithets 'grey-eyed' (*WT* 318), and her festivals the PANATHENAIA ATTIKA (adj. Attic), the entire geographical territory of the Athenian polis, comprising both the city proper and the territory of the demes (*C.* 209–10); its characteristic products included honey (*WT* 1192), and Athenians could think of themselves wryly as having distinctively 'Attic' qualities (*C.* 1176)

BELLEROPHON, hero from KORINTH, who escaped death after Stheneboia (*F.* 1043, 1049) fell in love with him then falsely accused him to her husband Proitos, whose guest Bellerophon was (*WT* 404; cf. the related story at Homer, *Iliad* 6.155 ff.); in Euripides' *Stheneboia*, Bellerophon later killed her by throwing her from the winged horse Pegasos, from which he fell himself and was mortally wounded in Euripides' *Bellerophon* (n. on *F.* 846)

CENTAURS, mythological tribe, half-man and half-horse in form, notorious for their wild, violent behaviour (*C.* 346, 350); HERAKLES fought against them (cf. *F.* 38, with Appendix on *Dramas* I)

CHAIREPHON, lifelong associate of SOKRATES (*C.* 104, 144, 156 etc.), reputed to have a sickly appearance (*C.* 503); cf. frs. 295, 393, 552, 584

COUNCIL (*boulê*), of 500, responsible for day-to-day administration of Athenian democracy (*WT* 79, 943), including preparation of ASSEMBLY agendas (*WT* 372, parodic); temporarily suspended in 412 (*WT* 808–9); the PRYTANEIS were its standing committee

DELOS, Aegean island, associated with the birth and cult of APOLLO (*C.* 596, *WT* 316, *F.* 659)

DEMETER, daughter of ZEUS and mother of PERSEPHONE, goddess of corn and fertility whose cults included the Eleusinian MYSTERIES (*F.* 383 ff., 886–7) and THESMOPHORIA (*WT* 286 ff.)

DIONYSOS, son of ZEUS and Semele (*WT* 990–1); god of wine (*WT* 747, *F.* 22) and ecstatic revels (*C.* 606, *F.* 1211–13), including comedy itself (*C.* 519, *F.* 357, 368); associated with Mount Nysa (*F.* 215); also called 'Bacchic' (*WT* 987, *F.* 1259), his followers bacchants (*C.* 605); patron god of Athens' dramatic festivals, including the springtime City Dionysia (*C.* 311)

ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES, see s.v. MYSTERIES

EURIPIDES (c. 485–406), the youngest (after AISCHYLOS and SOPHOKLES) of the trio of Athens' most famous tragedians; his work became associated with rhetorical style (e.g. *F.* 775), realistic psychology (*F.* 959–60), erotic subject-matter (*C.* 1371–2), including female characters like PHAIDRA (hence supposed misogyny, *WT passim*), and new intellectual ideas (*F.* 814–1533 *passim*)

GRACES, a trio of divine females, often associated with the MUSES (cf. e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony* 60–4), personifications of beauty, charm, sophistication in music and other activities (*C.* 773, *WT* 122, 301, *F.* 333, fr. 348)

HADES, the underworld (*F.* 69, 118, 172, etc.), ruled by PLOUTON

- HEKATE, a deity associated with the underworld, magic and monstrous apparitions (fr. 515); sometimes depicted as a torch-carrying figure (*WT* 858, 1362), she had various shrines in Athens (*F.* 366)
- HERAKLES, son of ZEUS and Alkmene (*F.* 531, 582), 'masculine' hero par excellence (*C.* 1050–2, *F.* 464), usually recognizable by his lion-skin and club (*F.* 46–7, etc.); his famous 'labours' included descent to the underworld to capture the fearsome dog Kerberos (*F.* 108–11, 467–9), but his comic persona is associated with gluttony (*F.* 62–5, 107, 549 ff.); he became a god after his death (*F.* 593)
- HERMES, traditionally a messenger-god, whose various associations included the underworld (*F.* 1126–48), guile (*WT* 1202), and pastoral matters (*WT* 977); often represented by a statue ('herm') outside the doors of Athenian houses (*C.* 1478 ff.)
- HOMER, traditional name for the creator of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the poems could be invoked as repositories of heroic values and general wisdom (*C.* 1056–7, *F.* 1034–41)
- HYPERBOLOS, prominent politician from the late 420s, ostracised c.416 and later murdered (Thucydides 8.73.3); for some a crude 'demagogue' (*C.* 876, cf. *F.* 570), of 'vulgar' origin (*C.* 1065), and corrupt (*C.* 1065–6); held various offices (*C.* 623–6); together with his mother (*C.* 552, *WT* 840) a frequent target of comic poets (*C.* 551–8)
- KINESIAS, a dithyrambic poet and chorus-trainer (*F.* 153, 1437, cf. *B.* 1372 ff.), mocked for both cultural and personal features (fr. 156), including an episode of supposedly scandalous behaviour in a temple (*F.* 366)
- KLEISTHENES, a late fifth-century Athenian of some social and perhaps political prominence, repeatedly satirized as effeminate and a passive homosexual (*C.* 355, *WT* 235, 574 ff., *F.* 48)
- KLEON, leading Athenian politician of the 420s (died 422), a major target of Aristophanes' early plays (*C.* 549–50), including *Babylonians* (see Appendix); elected general twice but satirized as a corrupt, vulgar 'demagogue' (*C.* 581–91, *F.* 569–77)
- KLEONYMOS, minor Athenian politician, probably an associate of KLEON's in the 420s; mocked for alleged perjury (*C.* 400), aberrant sexual behaviour (*C.* 675–6), and cowardice in battle (*C.* 353–4); there is a joke about his 'wife' at *WT* 605
- KLEOPHON, a radical democratic Athenian politician in the later fifth century; a *bête noire* for some (*WT* 805), he proposed a dole for poorer citizens (cf. *F.* 140–2); satirized as of foreign birth (*F.* 678–82), possibly for reasons connected with his mother (his father had served as a general), and as 'pro-war' (*F.* 1532–3); a whole comedy about him, by Plato comicus, was staged at the same festival as *Frogs*
- KORINTH, major Greek city on the isthmus (with paved causeway for vehicles: *WT* 648) between the Peloponnese and central Greece; traditional enemy of Athens (*C.* 710); named after Korinthos, son of Zeus (n. on *F.* 439), its heroes included BELLEROPHON

KRONOS, a Titan, ruler of the gods in the era before ZEUS, his son and over-thrower (C. 905–6); reference to the period of his rule of the world could be used to denote things very primitive (C. 398, 929, 1070)

LAMACHOS, prominent Athenian general before and during the Peloponnesian War; treated retrospectively (after death in 414) as a heroic military figure (WT 841, F. 1039), though the etymology of his name ('very warlike') lends itself to punning

MARATHON, remote NE region of ATTIKA (F. 1296), site of famous Athenian victory over invading Persian army in 490 (C. 986, WT 806)

MUSES, nine daughters of ZEUS (F. 875) and Memory, goddesses of poetic and artistic inspiration (C. 334, 972, WT 41, F. 229, 356, fr. 348); Euripides' Muse is comically personified at F. 1306 ff.

MYSTERIES, Eleusinian, an initiatory cult of DEMETER and PERSEPHONE, centred on their sanctuary at Eleusis in NW ATTIKA (C. 302–4); initiates were offered the prospect of a happy afterlife (F. 154–8, 316 ff.)

NIGHT, sometimes personified as a quasi-divine entity (WT 1065, F. 1331–5), in keeping with her status as a primeval cosmic deity (e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony* 20, 107, 123, etc.)

NYMPHS, lesser female divinities or nature-spirits typically linked to mountains, rivers, etc. (C. 271, WT 326, F. 1344) and associated with such deities as PAN (WT 978) and DIONYSOS (WT 992)

OLYMPOS, mountain in Thessaly, traditional abode of Zeus and other major gods (C. 270, WT 1069) who are hence called 'Olympian' (C. 366, 817, WT 331–2, 960)

PALAMEDES, a Greek warrior at Troy, famed for his cleverness (F. 1451) but an enemy of Odysseus, who had him condemned to death on a trumped-up charge of treachery, after which Palamedes' brother Oiax sent a message to their father scratched on oars which floated across the sea (WT 769–84)

PALLAS, a cult title of ATHENA (C. 300, 967, 1265, WT 1136)

PAN, a god of the wilds, associate of NYMPHS (WT 978) and often depicted with the lower body of a goat and playing reed-pipes (F. 230)

PANATHENAIA, major Athenian festival in honour of ATHENA, celebrated in midsummer with much public feasting (C. 386) and various athletic events (C. 988, F. 1090); its procession (C. 69, WT 811–12), depicted on the Parthenon frieze, culminated on the AKROPOLIS

PARNASSOS, large mountain (F. 1057) whose southern slope overlooks Delphi; occupied in winter by Dionysos (C. 603–6, F. 1212)

PERIKLES, major political leader at Athens from c.460 to 429; member of aristocratic Alkmaionid family (cf. n. on C. 46); served frequently as general (C. 213, 859) and pursued imperial policy of establishing cleruchies (cf. C. 203); known as 'the Olympian' for his impressive rhetorical style (A. 530)

- PERSEPHONE, also known as Pherrephatta (*WT* 287, *F.* 671), daughter of DEMETER and consort of PLOUTON; with her mother she was worshipped in the MYSTERIES and THESMOPHORIA (*WT* 101, 282, etc.)
- PHAIDRA, wife of Theseus; her adulterous passion for her stepson Hippolytos was a prime subject for tragedy (*WT* 153), including two versions of *Hippolytos* by Euripides (*WT* 497, 547, 550, *F.* 1043, 1052)
- PHOIBOS, lit. 'radiant', traditional title of APOLLO (*C.* 595, *WT* 109, 112, 128, *F.* 754)
- PLOUTON, god of the underworld, HADES (*F.* 163, 432, 784); the name was sometimes connected with *ploutos*, 'wealth' (cf. fr. 504)
- POSEIDON, brother of ZEUS and a major Olympian deity; god of the sea (*WT* 322, *F.* 665–7) and horses (*C.* 83)
- PRYTANEIS (SING. PRYTANIS), members of the standing committee of the COUNCIL, responsible for presiding at its meetings and those of the ASSEMBLY, each Athenian tribe's fifty representatives serving for a prytany (a tenth of the year); they were the first port of call for much official business (*WT* 654, 764, 854, 923 ff.)
- PYTHIAN (adj.), equivalent to 'Delphic' with reference to APOLLO's oracular shrine at Delphi (*WT* 332–3); the shrine itself can be called 'Pytho' (*F.* 659)
- SOKRATES (469–399), Athenian philosopher; mentor of CHAIREPHON; his popular reputation for esoteric intellectualism is reflected at *F.* 1491 as well as throughout *Clouds*
- SOPHOKLES (c. 496–406), major tragic playwright (*F.* 787–94, 1516), father of Iophon (*F.* 73–9); he died shortly after Euripides (cf. *F.* 76); had reputation for mildness of character (*F.* 82, 788–90)
- SPARTA, leading city of Peloponnese and head of military league at war with the Athenian empire 431–404 (*C.* 186, 214–18); in mythology, the home of Helen (*WT* 860); its core territory was Lakonia (cf. *C.* 186, *WT* 142, 423)
- TELEPHOS, mythical king of Mysia (in Asia Minor), wounded by Achilles during aborted first Greek expedition against Troy. Later came to Argos and, disguised as beggar (*C.* 922, cf. *F.* 842), infiltrated the Greek assembly to deliver a speech in defence of the Mysians/Trojans. When his disguise was uncovered, he seized Agamemnon's baby son Orestes as hostage and made supplication at an altar. Euripides' play on the subject may have acquired some notoriety; it certainly appealed to Aristophanes' parodic imagination (*WT* 689 ff., *F.* 855, 864, cf. *A.* 430–556)
- THESMOPHORIA, a three-day women-only fertility festival in honour of DEMETER and PERSEPHONE; one location, the Thesmophorion (*WT* 83, 89), may have been on the AKROPOLIS; the women camped in tents (*WT* 624, 658), and their various rituals included a day of fasting (*WT* 949, 985, cf. 570) and a day called Kalligeneia (*WT* 300)
- XENOKLES, late 5th-century minor tragic poet (*WT* 169, 440–3, *F.* 86), son of Karkinos (see *C.* 1261)

ZEUS, son of KRONOS, supreme ruler of the gods (*C.* 2, 153, 563, *WT* 315, *F.* 1278) on OLYMPOS; father of, among others, DIONYSOS (*WT* 990, *F.* 216), the MUSES (*F.* 875), and HERAKLES (*C.* 1048–50); in origin a sky-god (*C.* 368–79, 1279–80, *F.* 246), wielder of thunderbolts (*C.* 397); his titles include ‘Saviour’ (*WT* 1009, *F.* 738) and ‘paternal/ancestral’ (*C.* 1468); he frequently experiences sexual desire for human women (*C.* 1080–1)